

# THE BEST OF GROUNDCOVER

## NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

2010-2012

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News and Solutions from the Ground Up

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## Welcome to Best of Groundcover



by Susan Beckett  
Publisher

You are reading the first expansion of the Groundcover product line beyond our regular monthly issues. This is but one aspect of growth since our first edition hit the streets in July of 2010. Our monthly circulation has tripled since our first year and so has the number of people selling Groundcover each month. In addition to selling the paper, many of our vendors now also write for the paper and sell advertising in it. Many have taken courses from us and in college to improve their skills and enhance their employability. Many who used to sell Groundcover are now employed elsewhere.

Culling through past issues, I found so many pieces I wanted to share with you – way too many to include here. I encourage you to peruse old issues on our website by selecting News then Archives from the main menu. Thank you to all the people who contribute articles, poems, puzzles, cartoons and photographs to us, and thank you to those of you who took the time to vote on the selections and help us decide what to include in this anthology.

The start-up funding and support of 1Matters was critical to getting us off the ground. Office space provided by Bethlehem United Church of Christ provided the stability and foundation we needed for steady growth, as well as a supportive community that we treasure.

Countless hours of volunteer time from our main editorial staff, Laurie

Lounsbury, Lee Alexander and Andrew Nixon have been indispensable in producing Groundcover each month with limited resources. Regular office volunteers Sandy Schmoker, David Helmbold, Marquise Williams, Corliss Irrer, Greg Hoffman, Erica (Blom) Morell, Lucy Miller, Lisa Sonnenberg, Amber Keyes and Lee Alexander have made it possible for vendors to restock their papers throughout the day and have also provided coffee and companionship when vendors take breaks.

Our social work volunteers, Shoshana Mandel, Greg Pratt and Barbara Blom, along with the U-M School of Social Work interns they supervise and members of our Social Support team, connect our vendors with needed resources in the community. Many more volunteers write grant requests, bake for special celebrations, design ads, and do outreach projects.

The support of our steady advertisers gives us the financing we need to get the editing and layout services we need to produce a high-quality publication on a regular basis. I especially want to thank the People's Food Co-op, By the Pound, Kiwanis Thrift Store, Pizza Pino and First Baptist, First Presbyterian and Trinity Lutheran churches for their long-term and significant advertising commitments to us.

The religious community has been wonderful about allowing Groundcover to be sold in and around their facilities, welcoming our vendors as valued members of the community. And of course, all of you – our readers – who have become friends to some of those who sell you Groundcover each month. Our relationship with you is what keeps us going. This is truly a community project. Thank you!

### GROUNDCOVER MISSION:

*Groundcover News exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.*

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## Real Change, microcredit and Groundcover

by Susan Beckett

"Real Change! Real Change!" exclaimed the man on the Seattle sidewalk as I passed through the supermarket doors. I was confused. Did he think I'd be giving him slugs? Upon learning he was homeless and offering to sell me a newspaper, I eagerly traded my dollar for his paper and had an *aha* moment: this was a brilliant application of microenterprise here in the United States!

Twenty years of working on solutions to global poverty familiarized me with microcredit projects of many forms. The Grameen bank became famous when it and Mohammed Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize, yet it was a Kenyan micro-lender, Jamii Bora, that sprang to my mind.

After a couple of years of lending money to the very poor so they could start their own small businesses, Jamii Bora experimented with offering beggars small items like ribbons that they could sell instead of begging. It was immediately apparent that most people preferred selling to begging and many of them went on to become successful entrepreneurs.

Joyce Wairimu eventually opened six businesses and now employs many of her former colleagues. Wilson Maina, once a thief, now owns four businesses. He scours the streets for boys like him and has convinced hundreds to get started in a business instead of stealing. Jamii Bora started in 1999 by making loans to 50 beggars in one of the worst

slums in Nairobi. By the end of 2007, they had 170,000 savers and 60,000 borrowers.

Microcredit offers the poorest of the poor a chance at economic self-sufficiency. For many it is a path of redemption; an opportunity to overcome poor choices made or circumstances thrust upon them earlier in their lives. They have a saying at Jamii Bora: "We have fast climbers out of poverty and we have slow climbers, but everyone is a climber." That's my wish for Groundcover – that it provides an economic toe-hold for our vendors to use in their climb, and the wisdom and awareness we as a community need to nurture their efforts.

## Ethical Egoism – the curse we share

by James Manning  
Groundcover Vendor

Have you ever heard the saying money is the root of all evil? When you give it some thought, you can't help but come to the conclusion that it most certainly is. The human species is not mature enough to handle currency and power, evidenced by the abuses we witness every day. We might think that we are on the right track since technology is rapidly evolving, but the sad truth is that we are as savage as ever, and immoral acts are connected to money in one way or another. Whenever we can't explain our actions, we rationalize, and today the excuses for the pursuit of wealth and power have become the widely-practiced philosophy of "ethical egoism."

Ethical egoism is the idea that the pursuit of wealth and power by any means necessary is justified. It is an epithet for the dark side of humanity. Throughout history, the impoverished have been victimized by those with wealth and power. Every day we see examples of hatred towards the poor and the glorification of the rich. If you take one who is homeless and compare them to a drug dealer in terms of respect from common people, the dealer receives better treatment, all because of the money that he or she makes. Being a vendor for this paper, I see this philosophy in practice every day in the actions of the people who ignore and even laugh at the cause we stand for. If the tables turn, then it's a different story.

Our country is in an economic depression. People are in dire need of jobs, but rather than prioritizing the creation of jobs, our government opts to bail out multi-billion-dollar corporations who for the most part go ahead and lay off workers anyway. There are times when I get to wondering, "Who is really running this country?" and "Are things ever gonna improve while all this greed is around us?"

Humanity has been on a downhill moral decline ever since the concept of value spawned the accumulation of wealth. Clearly the world has to change. I despair that will never happen. We don't think about the world around

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## It's the cracks that let the light in



by Rev. Dr.  
**Martha Brunell**  
Pastor, Bethlehem  
United Church of  
Christ

I was recently on retreat at Casa Del Sol, House of the Sun. I treasure each of my days there. This retreat house is located at Ghost Ranch, a Presbyterian conference and retreat center in the high desert mountains of New Mexico, about 70 miles from Santa Fe. The Casa is an old adobe hacienda. It is located several miles from the main ranch area, up a breathtakingly beautiful road. This is where Georgia O'Keefe did much of her painting.

Although the hacienda has been restored with love and care in recent years, it is still prone to cracks as the desert land around it shifts. I have been there twice this year. Both weeks have featured a brilliant full moon. My visits have been so well-timed. Nights are very dark at the ranch, which makes the soft moonlight even more prominent.

I have a habit of rising early in the morning there to take pictures as the sun is rising. The light wash of dawn is a surprising and beautiful visual gift for us early risers. One morning before the sun was up over the horizon, the moon was setting to the west slightly above a portion of the hacienda. That adobe wall sports a noticeable crack just beneath the roofline. One of my favorite photos from the week features that

cracked adobe illuminated by the full moon as it set. The cracked abode and moonlight reminded me of a quote I tucked in my journal and brought with me on retreat. These words are credited to Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen: There is a crack in everything; That's how the light gets in.

In a culture that prizes perfection and self-sufficiency or the appearance of them, not much value is placed upon what is cracked. But in truth, everyone and everything has its share of cracks. If Cohen is to be believed, there is the potential of wondrous illumination in the cracked places.

No doubt there are plenty of cracks in the lives, experiences, and efforts of those of us who value and tend, write

for, sell, and pray over Groundcover. Cohen's words ask us to reconsider how we view our cracks. Do we attempt to hide them or mask them with our shame? Or do we remember the light we may see when we look at them with gentle eyes? What is broken can often be broken open into something greater.

In this time of year when many faith and wisdom traditions in northern climates have celebrations around light, I suggest we lift up the healing light that shines along the pathways of our cracks. May that light be guidance and blessing for each of us and for others through us. Thank you for the cracks you reveal that the light might shine upon us all.

## Keeping Our Hearts Open



**Andrew Nixon**  
Associate Editor

I awoke this morning to the sound of a sneeze.

Sneezes, actually. If I had to put a number on it, I'd guess about 243 of them... A painting contractor evidently had a job on my apartment property, and was in the midst of a sneezing attack that surely must qualify for some kind of record. Naturally, he was standing right outside my bedroom window.

As I eased my way into my morning routine of Bach and breakfast, I found myself feeling quite irritated by this sonic intrusion into my peaceful bubble of privacy. I thought to myself, *Who IS this guy? Who does he think he is that he can feel entitled to just stand there*

*and SNEEZE incessantly outside MY window? Maybe he shouldn't be inhaling all those paint fumes. Maybe I should go out there and offer him a Claritin.* This last thought, mind you, had nothing to do with compassion.

And then, around sneeze number 217, an interesting thing happened. No, the man did not stop sneezing – recall that he had at least twenty-six more to go. What happened was a sudden shift within my own psyche: one moment, I was telling myself that I had just about had it with Sir Sneezealot, and the next moment, I was feeling genuinely sorry for the poor fellow. All my irritation dissolved in that instant. In short, I cheerfully resumed my morning routine, the ambient acoustics blending seamlessly with the Bach – and the only thing that had changed was my perspective.

I trust you have had a similar experience – if you're like me, this kind of thing happens daily. You encounter something in your sphere of experience that, for one reason or another, you

don't like – the driver who cut you off on the morning commute, the stranger with the funny hairdo on the elevator, your own insistence on needing to win an argument – and you proceed to do everything within your power to deny or complain about it. Ironically, our reactions often create more suffering than the things we are reacting negatively to. In such moments, often the relevant question is not, *Who or what can I blame or criticize for this unpleasantness I feel?* or *How can I make it go away?* Instead, we can simply ask ourselves, *Does my response to this situation serve me?*

Whenever we operate unconsciously from habit or shrink back from reality in repulsion or fear, it means our hearts are not fully open. It is easy to see why we so often behave this way. Life is painful, precisely because it is beautiful; and the more we care, the more it can hurt. We all have been wounded by life in various ways and to varying degrees. When we hurt, our instinct is to protect ourselves from further pain. To do this, we shut part of ourselves down – we close our hearts to a shade or a species of experience – so that more pain doesn't get in. We shut down to protect ourselves, but in so doing we also shut out much that nourishes our being.

Of course, we cannot remain indiscriminately open to everything, always; sometimes life asks us to put our foot down, draw the line, say no, express our disapproval, even fight back. However, if we keep our defenses up habitually, chances are good that we will wake up one day late in life and realize to our horror how much more richly we could have truly *lived*. We may then reflect sadly on the countless moments of beauty unappreciated, the unlikely friendships overlooked, the spontaneous acts of generosity passed

over, the opportunities to expand our views denied, the chances to express ourselves suppressed. We will seal ourselves off from the vast possibilities of experience; in short, we will stop growing.

Fortunately, it is never too late to rediscover open engagement with a forgotten aspect of life. For to discover something is really to dis-cover, or *uncover*, something that never was truly lost. Kindness, generosity, empathy, forgiveness, self-acceptance, open-mindedness, wonder, curiosity, exuberance – these traits are *essential* to our very nature; they cannot be tainted, diluted, or erased. In contrast, the hard-heartedness keeping us from engaging life fully is like the white noise on a poorly-tuned radio, obscuring the clear signal. The radio signal itself remains unaffected by our inexpert tuning – it's just “waiting” to be plucked out of the air by a properly-adjusted receiver.

So how do we learn, or relearn, to “tune in” to the wonder, the beauty, the teachings of each fresh moment? I recommend baby steps, beginning with opening up to yourself: gently observe your reactions, your prejudices and predispositions. Let go of any judgments you may have about them – often it is these self-judgments alone that keep our hearts and minds from naturally expanding to embrace a fuller reality. Recognize that you are not alone in this – we all have wounds and are on the same basic journey toward wholeness. Learn to take deep breaths during difficult moments, forgiving yourself for your limitations, and allowing yourself to enjoy fully the pleasure of simply being alive. And make a choice, renewing it whenever you catch yourself, to open your heart a little wider every day.

## The curse of self-interest

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us much, but just the same, there are horrors in the world that would turn you a paler color. I consider the underground sex slave industry and the West African diamond trade to be among the most horrible practices sustained by wealth and power.

So am I saying every last one of us is pure evil? Not at all, just that the allure of wealth and power has snared a great many of us. Even to the impoverished money is practically needed like oxygen since we have become dependent on

it. I think about this a lot and I try to find solutions to this greatest of all problems. I keep coming to the same conclusion and that is to abolish all currency. If we are very lucky, we might find true equality in that seemingly impossible reality.

There is some good in this world and we have to hold on to what there is. At least we can preserve goodness from being swallowed up in evil so long as there are those of us who follow our hearts ahead of our financial interests. Those who do are always the better human beings.

## Street newspaper conference benefits vendors, volunteers

by Shelley DeNeve  
Groundcover Vendor

Five representatives from Groundcover attended the 2011 North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA) conference held in Nashville, TN on October 13-16. NASNA is an organization that supports and cultivates effective self-sustaining street newspapers which promote power and opportunity for people living in poverty. NASNA is strongly committed to empowering local street newspapers to develop leadership among poor people, while cultivating journalistic integrity and sustainable street papers.

NASNA's annual conference was hosted by Nashville's own street newspaper, The Contributor. Have you heard of that street newspaper before? Or maybe you heard of Streetwise from Chicago or Real Change from Seattle, Washington. There were approximately 60 registrants and a total of 14 street newspapers from around the United States and Canada attending the conference. There were also two newly-established papers and four prospective new newspapers.

The conference started with the attendees having the pleasure of meeting and greeting noted journalist, writer, and political figure John Seigenthaler for whom the conference

location, the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, is named. He is known as a prominent defendant of freedom of expression. He also wrote for The Tennessean and was the founding editorial director of USA Today.

The conference consisted of three workshop tracks. Each person chose among the offerings each session from among:

- Vendor Track (Vendor Behavior, Vendor Forum)
- Editorial Track (Editorial Collaboration, Editorial Basics)
- Fundraising Track (Surviving and Thriving in a Small Shop, Finding the Money)

Each day there were two to three workshops for each track. Friday evening, conference attendees were invited to the Street Newspaper Awards dinner held at an old bank in downtown Nashville that was converted into a home owned by a fellow named Wan Choi. Speakers included Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, and keynote speaker Lee Stringer. Stringer is the author of two books, *Sleepaway* and *Grand Central Winter*, the latter based on the 12 years he lived homeless and addicted under New York City's Grand Central Station. Mr. Stringer was a former editor and columnist for the New York



TOP: (from left) Groundcover representatives Shelley DeNeve, La Shawn Courtwright, Lee Alexander, Rissa Haynes and Susan Beckett at the national street newspaper conference in Nashville, Tenn.



LEFT: Rissa Haynes at breakfast with attendees from all over the United States and Canada

street newspaper, Street News. He also has written essays that have appeared in various notable publications such as *The Nation*, *The New York Times* and *Newsday*.

After the workshops on Saturday, attendees road a bus to downtown Nashville to tour The Contributor's office, housed in the Presbyterian

church. At the end of the tour, the annual meeting was held in the sanctuary of the church to elect four new board members. Afterward, attendees were able to go check out the sights and sounds of Nashville. Luckily, the Americana Music Festival was going on and top-flight entertainment of all types was available through the night at different establishments.

## What Groundcover attendees brought home from the conference

### Lee Alexander:

The street newspaper tribe is a small family spread across a large area. Having a meeting like this is a big deal for us. It isn't often that you meet such a large group of people that you have so much in common with. We speak the same language. Some of these organizations have been around for a decade or more. We're so young by comparison. They are great mentors for us and it's exciting that they're so willing and interested in helping Groundcover grow.

For me, the highlight of the trip was the awards dinner. It was a chance for NASNA to celebrate our collective successes. I was moved by the professionalism of our membership. I think we all left feeling like winners that night.

### Shelley:

The scenery was grand. The weather was terrific. We stayed in dorm rooms at Vanderbilt University. While at the workshops, we enjoyed delicious and nutritious breakfasts, lunches

and snacks. In the workshops I felt I was able to voice my opinion and ask questions without feeling unimportant or brushed off like in the corporate world. I felt a great deal of camaraderie with people I have never met before. I felt we all had something in common: to sell a great street newspaper that everyone wants to read. I thought to myself, "Wow, there is really something to this street newspaper business." I'm hoping that GCN will grow in popularity to the point where we can have some paid staff. I would like to be a part of that staff at some point.

I would also like to incorporate some new material that I have seen in the other street newspapers that we currently don't put in our paper. New types of writing would make our paper even more irresistible to read. I want to thank all who contributed to our scholarship fund. If it weren't for you, we would not have been able to partake in this opportunity to grow personally and professionally.

### Rissa:

Many thanks and deep gratitude to the

financial and in-kind gift donors who afforded me the opportunity for a great experience at the NASNA conference. I enjoyed the excitement expressed by people from every imaginable and unimaginable background. These people were enthusiastic about the opportunity to voice their emotions and empowered by the press to both earn an honest income and educate the public from a perspective that is rarely heard.

I met and heard from President John F. Kennedy's administrative assistant, John Seigenthaler. He was one of the founders of the First Amendment building, where we had many of our nutritious and delicious meals along with insightful seminars and forums. I met an inspirational former vendor who secretly shopped and encouraged new vendors as her "mission." I was personally escorted by a real estate investor who turned a downtown bank into his private home and shared this private home with NASNA for the Awards Banquet.

I went to the conference with a grateful heart to the donors who made it possible for me to attend the NASNA

conference. While at the conference, I was impacted and impressed mostly by the passionate people with a poignant purpose, whom I met personally. As I left Nashville, I left with the encouragement to continue that legacy of empowerment, impact and inspiration. Again, thanks to everyone who made this wonderful experience possible.

### LaShawn:

I was honored to hear and speak with authors Lee Stringer and Chris Scott F. These men have a miraculous ability to make people feel like Alice in Wonderland, because even if you haven't been there, you will almost be able to say you have when they describe it. I learned some key principles that will assist me in developing my writing style. I was honored to be presented writings from the two as well: Lee Stringer's *Grand Central Winter: Stories from the Street*, which he autographed and wrote a simple message for me to keep in mind, and Chris Scott F's writings for *The Contributor*. Chris

see NASNA, page 5

## The Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice

by Lee Alexander  
Editor

The 1960s were an interesting time in the history of Ann Arbor. As one gravitational center for American peace activists opposing military involvement in Southeast Asia, the city sprung countless organizations dedicated to political reform. Few had the staying power of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice (ICPJ).

By the end of 1965 America was steadily being pulled deeper into the Vietnam conflict. It was during this period of escalation that a small group from the local Jewish, Christian, and Unitarian communities in Ann Arbor met to explore ideas for collaboration in opposition to the war. Their original mission was “to combat the twin evils of war and hunger.” Nearly five decades on, ICPJ’s work continues.

ICPJ focuses broadly on six target areas, one-third of which specifically address issues related to poverty and homelessness. The group leads a task force on hunger as well as one on racial and economic justice. The organization’s work reflects an international outlook but it very much approaches policy from a local perspective.

Chuck Warpehoski has been ICPJ’s director for nearly 10 years. His background cultivated valuable skills that he applies to his current work. “I had experience in community organizing,” Warpehoski said. “I had experience with faith communities. I’m a member of the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting, a Quaker group.

“My faith, it teaches me to be a peace-maker. It teaches me to work for justice and I get really angry when people use religion to promote intolerance, war, and oppression. The ability to both live

my values and make sure there is a religious voice for justice and inclusion and peace – it’s been a great fit for me.”

When our nation’s economy began to slump a few years ago, local governments were hit hard. They looked for places to reduce budgets. Human services, often politically weak, are an easy target for cuts. When this reality began to emerge at the tail-end of last year, ICPJ helped lead a push back encouraging the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners to rethink its proposed drop in funding.

“When the City and the County were facing budget troubles,” Warpehoski said, “one of the first places they looked to cut was services for people who are vulnerable. I think when our local community has so many people in crisis, that’s the last place we should be cutting.

“We organized people to speak out at City Council, to speak out at the County Commission, to sign this sign-on letter, and show that there’s broad support for maintaining our social safety net. And it worked. The City and the County both went back and said, ‘We are going to continue to fund this.’”



CROP Walk gathering in the 1980s in front of the space shared by St. Clare’s Episcopal Church and Temple Beth Emeth.

One of the ICPJ’s tools against cuts was a sign-on letter that garnered broad support within both the faith community and the larger business community. Nearly 100 prominent local leaders agreed to come out in support of continuing human services funding. The letter, in part, read:

*Maintaining the social safety net is good policy. We are fortunate to have community leaders who understand that maintaining human services funding is not just an ethical response to increasing need, it is also sound public policy...*

*We recognize that you face difficult budget decisions, and we are grateful for your initial decision to avoid the devastating effects that could come from cutting funds to the most crucial support programs, such as those for children, people with mental illnesses, and the poor.*

Hunger and poverty typically go hand in hand. Food security and scarcity is not just a problem that impacts Third World economies. It is difficult for most of us to accept the troubling fact that our own neighbors might not have enough to eat. It is even harder when the burden falls on children, a situation which happens all too often. We are fortunate to be part of a community that works hard to push back against the reality of persistent hunger. ICPJ works closely with other area organizations to see that everybody gets enough to eat.

The organization’s new program director, Bill Alt, puts a great deal of effort and energy into heading their Hunger Task Force. Every fall, for 38 years, ICPJ has organized a local

fundraising event called the CROP Hunger Walk (Community Response to Overcome Poverty). Ann Arbor’s CROP Walk is part of a nationwide effort to address global food security and support nutrition programs here and abroad. Last year’s local Walk raised nearly \$52,000. Twenty-five percent of the funds went to about a dozen local programs that tackle hunger within our area. The remainder is pooled together and used globally.

“The areas that I’m personally passionate about happen to coincide with one of the areas that I work on here,” Alt said. “These issues of hunger and food justice and how we raise food, how we develop food, and how people have access to food. Also by thinking holistically about how all of our food choices, in the way that we produce our food, affect people – not just here locally, but also around the world.”

Faith in Food Gardens was a program ICPJ organized three years ago. The idea is to encourage places of worship to dedicate space on their properties to cultivating vegetable gardens. The idea is increasingly popular.

“Here are these communities,” Alt said, “and some of them have a lot of property. They have land that’s oftentimes devoted to grass, that’s just big lawns. The thought is, ‘could the faith community, could these churches and congregations come together and devote some of their property to raise food for the hungry, the most vulnerable in our communities?’ Three years ago we partnered with Food Gatherers to start this initiative, where we would encourage the congregations in Washtenaw County to do just that – to start a garden, whatever size that they want.”

Warpehoski added, “This is local, fresh, healthy food, which is some of the hardest food for the food banks to acquire.”

The Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice is an organization born of an era of idealistic optimism. The turmoil of the Vietnam era created a generation that not only witnessed war and violence but believed in the transformative power of cooperation, collaboration and the power of community built on shared values. Today, with most of ICPJ’s original peers no longer operating, it is refreshing to see a seasoned group carry forward this vision and to see its leadership develop, taken up by a new generation.

## NASNA conference

continued from page 4

shares a love for writing poetry just as I do.

I picked up on some other significant things on fundraising, article collaborations, expectations and responsibilities of Board Members. I learned about other movements that help support the NASNA mission such as the “Housing First” program. One of the most important things that I learned was about First Amendment Freedom of Speech rights and battle between NASNA and Williamson

County, one of the wealthiest counties in the United States, over the right to sell newspapers there. The ACLU is representing NASNA in what many consider to be a landmark case.

I was awarded a NASNA scholarship to attend this conference and was also accepted as a member of the Membership Committee for NASNA. THANK YOU for such a wonderful opportunity and experience.

## Rock steady art inspires peace, harmony and patience



**Laurie Lounsbury**  
Founding Editor

When you see the phrase, “Jerry Mack rocks,” in print, you might logically think it’s a reference to Jerry Mack and the Terraplanes, a rocking rhythm and blues band that’s a perennial favorite in Ann Arbor.

But you’d be wrong. “Jerry Mack rocks” also refers to the rocks Jerry Mack balances in artistic formations along the banks of the Huron River.

Rock Steady is the name of Mack’s artistic venue, and his work can often be seen along the river’s edge at Barton Pond, where he carefully stacks rocks as high as six feet into the air. Typically, each rock formation has six rocks in it and they are balanced according to their weight and shape.

“I usually try to make it six levels, which is the number of Bodhi levels you go through to reach enlightenment in Buddhism,” Mack said.

Not one to take the path of least resistance, Mack studies the rocks he’s using to find the perfect balance points. “It’s what I call rock steady, when it



rests on three balance points and the rock below supports the rock above the middle rock,” Mack explained. “It’s all about mass and gravity.”

Mack started balancing rocks in northern Michigan, when he would collect interesting rocks during the days along Lake Michigan and then spend the evenings sitting at a picnic table and trying to balance them.

“The real satisfaction to me is that I’m creating something out of the ordinary and it challenges people’s perception of rocks,” Mack said. “Mostly, people see rocks lying on the ground, part of the typical landscape, and then it changes.”



Mack also finds pleasure in the balancing process. “Peace and serenity come later; during the building process it’s about overcoming the challenge of a difficult situation.”

When mass and gravity are part of an artistic process, the artist has to be ready for the inevitable act of gravity when perfect balance isn’t achieved.

“The unsteadiness of the formation when it’s not in balance makes me feel like I’m working with a wild animal that’s sedated,” Mack said. “It moves slowly, but you can get hurt if you don’t get out of the way pretty quickly.” The risk factor is ever-present, but not a deterrent for Mack.

Building the balanced rock formations is just the first step in the mixed media art process Mack pursues. After spending hours getting multiple arrangements of rocks to balance, he then picks up his camera and photographs his work before a strong wind or storm knocks the sculptures to the ground.

Mack does outdoor photography for his large pieces, and takes smaller rocks indoors to be photographed near windows where the sunlight adds to the natural allure of the arrangements.

A full slideshow of Mack’s work can be found at: [www.terraformproductions.com](http://www.terraformproductions.com)

## The butterfly effect – a stirring in Ann Arbor makes a big change in Haiti

by **Laurie Lounsbury**

No matter how many news videos you’ve watched about Haiti – no matter how many photos you’ve seen – nothing can prepare you for the reality that is Haiti.

It is a country with lush scenery and stunning ocean views contrasted with crushing poverty and crumbled buildings. A country of poor people suffering from crippling yet curable diseases; a country of proud people dressed in crisp, ironed clothes emerging from homes the size of a U.S. bathroom and made of corrugated tin and canvas. A country of the world’s greatest mangoes, coffee and rum, yet a country whose infrastructure doesn’t support an export economy to share those products with the rest of the world.

In the midst of such chaos, I had the honor of seeing “the butterfly effect” in motion. The butterfly effect is the sensitive dependence on initial conditions, where a small change at one place can result in large differences

in a later state. Hence the name, which refers to a butterfly flapping its wings in one place and creating a hurricane in another place at a later time.

I traveled to Haiti with two intrepid Ann Arbor women whose determination and untiring efforts have resulted in high-quality nursing education in Haiti. They are among the group of 16 dedicated people from around the United States who comprise the Haiti Nursing Foundation board.

In light of the problems Haiti perpetually faces, it seemed to me a Herculean task, if not an impossible dream, for someone to accomplish anything truly meaningful in Haiti which would make a difference in the lives of Haitians.

Create quality careers for Haitians? Improve health care? In the poorest



country in the Western Hemisphere, I doubted if these goals were attainable.

Luckily, no one ever suggested as much to Ruth Barnard and Margie VanMeter.

Ruth Barnard, retired nursing professor emeritus from the University of Michigan, and

see **HAITI**, page 11



Above, new nurses celebrate graduation from the Faculty of Nursing Science. Below, a scene from the streets.

## Cash by the dime



**James Manning**  
Vendor

Can-collecting, also known as canning or can-dogging, has been an alternative for making cash for the impoverished in Michigan for as long as bottle returns have existed. With our current lack of employment, it has grown to a widespread practice. No matter what situation a person finds themselves in, money is always a necessity, whether or not it is available. Canning may not be the perfect solution for financial strife, but it is still a form of income that, to many, can't be passed up.

In some situations it is quite profitable. The ever-popular tradition of tailgating during game days has had a significant impact on those who turn to bottle returns for income. One could make over a hundred dollars during a home game if they take the initiative! And that's appealing to more than the homeless community. People have been known to can on game days just to pay off rent, insurance, car payments, you name it. If you could make a hundred dollars in less than twelve hours would you take up the offer?



Joe Green is a junior at U-M. During December 2010's Big Chill hockey face-off at the Big House against the Spartans, Green struggled under the weight of three overstuffed black trash bags filled with beer cans.

"I know they all look down their noses at me for picking up cans," Green said, about the other students. "But it doesn't mean a thing to me because I left more than a thousand dollars worth lying on the ground back there. I just couldn't carry more."

I have canned on these glorious days of profit myself and have discovered it is totally worth the effort. On top of the

rewards of the labor, this also spreads homeless awareness. It seems that society itself is open to the homeless during these days, giving a chance to socialize and for a few hours leave the burden of street life behind them. This is very important because, too often, those who live such lives seem to be locked out, so to speak, from the rest of mainstream society.

It's not only on game day that canning is profitable. Some do this task every day. I have always admired the persistence with which these people labor for the reward of simple comforts. *Do what you gotta do to get by*, seems to be the code of street life. Since most

employers are disinclined to hire such people, returning cans is the obvious alternative.

Ever hear the expression, "Nothing in life is free"? How could anyone expect to survive with absolutely no income? The answer is simple – you can't. We all, as humans, have an instinct of survival and can-collecting to get by is one of many demonstrations of that will.

This practice will continue for as long as bottle returns are accepted. Even donations have been organized through can-collecting. Washtenaw County Project Outreach Team or (PORT) has conducted can drives to fund their street soccer team.

And, all-in-all, despite the humiliation collectors go through, the scrutinizing glares of those who would never consider such labor and never stop to think that this is another cycle of life, it's a cycle for the best. Recycling helps the environment by preserving resources and removing litter. It isn't often that people stop to think that can-collectors are aiding this cause. Can-collectors should be proud of what they are doing, because they are contributing more than some realize. This practice negates the term "worthless." Worthless cannot possibly define what can-collectors are.

## From around the world to By the Pound

by Susan Beckett

Behind the placid friendly face of Glenn Bourland, owner of By The Pound, is a man whose wildly shifting life belies the stability evident in his bulk foods store. Perhaps his adventures attuned him to listening closely. It's tricky in a place like By the Pound where there is only one register and customers are accustomed to breezing through. Still, Glenn tries hard to listen to customers, especially about what he should stock.

"I have almost 200 spices now and people love the spices. They're fresh and they're inexpensive," Glenn crowed. His selection of teas is also very popular and he sells a lot of bulk coffee, including Ann Arbor's Roos Roast. Customers claim the red popcorn from Ann Arbor's Bur Oaks Farm is the best they have ever tasted. It is the terrific selection of bulk Callebaut chocolate that often draws this writer to the store.

Whenever possible, Glenn buys local. He credits the popularity of the nuts he sells to their exquisite freshness, roasted weekly by Rocky Peanut of Detroit. Customers frequently tell him that By the Pound is their favorite store because of the quality and the opportunity to buy exactly how much they want. It is



Glenn Bourland has owned By the Pound for more than 18 of the 30 years it has been a locally owned Ann Arbor destination.

one of the few places in town where the ingredients for a nourishing meal for one can be purchased for a dollar.

The economic downturn has actually spurred business. "Liquor, fast food and By the Pound do better in a bad economy," Glenn quipped. He's learned that people are doing more cooking and baking for themselves and for others as gifts, and they come to him purchase their basic ingredients in bulk.

But how did a boy who grew up in the Santa Cruz area and attended the University of Hawaii on a golf scholarship come to be the proprietor of such a store in Ann Arbor, Michigan? It's the tale of a man finding himself again and again, and it began when he dropped out of college after three years because he didn't know where he was going.

He returned to California where he

worked as a phone clerk on the Pacific Stock Exchange and soon yearned to be a trader. He bartered golf lessons for training and financial backing as an options trader-broker. Six months later he was on the floor trading. Three lucrative years he was ready for another change and set off to bicycle around the world.

He and his friend Glen (with one 'n') set out for the East coast. As they passed through Death Valley, they found a Japanese tourist stretched out at the side of the road, overcome with thirst. He had set out with insufficient water, unaware of the extreme heat and aridity. They rehydrated him and escorted him to a town, then continued on their dusty way.

Near dusk they stumbled on what appeared to be a ranger's house in the vicinity of the campground for which they had ridden uphill five very hot miles. Lured by a hose with water, they started cleaning themselves off, but within minutes they were naked and dancing like children in a sprinkler. They gratefully set up camp on the scrubby lawn and fell into a deep sleep, from which they were violently aroused at midnight by an indignant assistant

see BY THE POUND, page 10

## Dumpster diving – finding good food in bad places

by Karen L. Totten

Loaves of whole wheat bread and frozen pizzas. Cartons of unbroken eggs. Packages of cheddar cheese. Crowns of broccoli. Packs of chewing gum. High protein bars. Bags of limes and lemons. Salmon. Brisket. It is surprising what can be found discarded as waste in a grocery store dumpster on a typical night of food reclamation in Ann Arbor.

For some, such reclaimed food is ambrosia. It means supper. For others, it is economic necessity—making the grocery dollars stretch and securing enough to feed a family. And every rescued box of salvaged food is another chunk of refuse that doesn't wind up in a landfill. In fact, nationwide a whole lifestyle has emerged around the "freegan" philosophy, a group which looks to offset the impact of food waste. And they have plenty of pickings. According to some accounts, in countries like the United States, 40 to 50 percent of food is thrown away.

These are a few of the reasons that 18-year-old Ann Arbor high school graduate Forrest provides for why, in the middle of the night, he hoists himself into the provenance found in those big metal dumpsters found behind most stores and businesses.

It's clear, however, that dumpster diving, also called "binning" – or "skipping" in the United Kingdom – isn't a lark that this young adult is doing for kicks. Forrest has been called Santa Claus for his distributing food out of the back of his car to unhoused people around the city. "You go where people hang out, throw open the trunk and let them choose what they want," he said.

According to those who work with unhoused populations, approximately several thousand persons are currently without permanent homes in the Ann Arbor area. Of the organized food service providers, at least two provide daily meals: St. Andrew's Church on Division provides a breakfast for anyone who needs, and Food Gatherers Community Kitchen within the Delonis Center prepares a lunch and nightly meal. Between them, these organizations can feed hundreds people on a daily basis. However, there are many people in need who slip through the cracks, for various reasons.

Forrest knows a loose group, not organized, of about 10-15 people who regularly dumpster dive, and there are plenty of divers around from differing backgrounds. He ran into a



guy one night pulling out items for his daughter's school lunch. "Hey, I found cheese sticks!" he called out excitedly. Lukas, another diver from Ann Arbor, who has been "dumpstering" 50 or more times over the last year-and-a-half, said that on one recent night he encountered 15 people just at one bin. "You had to wait in line," he said.

Organized groups exist in many large cities nationwide, and the *Michigan Daily* ran a piece about a year ago on one student co-op in town which prepares all their meals from reclaimed food.

Although food is a primary dumpster recovery commodity, on occasion one finds other treasures in food bins. People will throw away just about anything nameable, Forrest said. On one occasion, he found a perfectly good folding camping chair, another time an atomic clock, still ticking, and still in its original packaging. Places around the university are good for furniture and dry goods, he noted, especially in the spring on move-out days.

Perhaps one of the oddest things showed up in one of Forrest's dives a few weeks before Christmas: two small cardboard boxes, still wrapped in holiday paper and addressed "To Trisha

from Santa." Inside were the wooden pegs and metal fittings one would find in an accessory package to a piece of assemble-it-yourself furniture, as from Ikea. The rest of the gift and the rest of its story are left to speculation.

For others, it is economic necessity – making the grocery dollars stretch and securing enough to feed a family. And every rescued box of salvaged food is another chunk of refuse that doesn't wind up in a landfill.

Lukas has had similar luck finding useable throwaways – a quality shoulder bag in good condition, and a tie, for more formal occasions. His favorite find, though, was a whole cake, untouched, ready to eat.

To establish how

much perfectly good stuff is thrown away each day in America – estimates are about 4 1/2 pounds per person, per day – some of Forrest's friends from California outfitted an entire empty apartment in under three months with items they rescued from dumpsters – including furniture, dishes, clothing, food and even art supplies. Here is a link to the movie they made of their experience: [www.snagfilms.com/films/title/I\\_love\\_trash](http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/I_love_trash)

Of course, for some people, dumpster diving is not an option because they can't get past the queasiness invoked by eating something thrown into a trash bin. But according to both Forrest and Lukas, some food pulled out of the bins is perfectly good. For a variety of reasons, stores either cannot sell the

discarded merchandise any longer or are making way for new product. Locally, many stores participate in Food Gatherers as a way to handle excess food. Nonetheless, plenty still ends up in dumpsters.

Forrest advises a check to ensure boxes are not open and packages are not torn, places where bacteria could enter. Often, stores will purge items that are at their sell-by date, but if one had been in the store earlier that day, would have been able to take home and use several days later, still fresh.

And there is the tingle test for meat. Forrest is a vegetarian but his friends have told him that, if when touching the tip of one's tongue on a piece of dumpster meat the tongue tingles, the meat is likely not safe to eat. Other kinds of spoilage are more obvious – bloated cartons and cans or that recognizable, distinctive sour milk smell.

"You just don't take those things," Forrest noted. He has a pair of gloves he usually wears to keep his hands off possible pieces of broken glass or anything truly gross, but finds that other special equipment is not needed.

Dumpstering is usually done at night. Most divers go after stores have closed and employees have locked up, to avoid confrontations and to protect the employees from getting in trouble if – as in the case of some stores – they are sympathetic to the process but unwilling to flat out condone it. Forrest has been asked to leave a few times, or come back later, but neither he nor Lukas has ever encountered the police. Of the one situation Forrest has heard of where friends met the police, the group was left to their activity after the police established they were not making drug deals or trying to break into the store.

In *I Love Trash*, archeologist Dr. Timothy Jones states that dumpster diving is a modern manifestation of work that has gone on for centuries—the rag pickers and metal collectors who derived reasonable incomes from these activities. Others see the practice as unclean, with inherent risks for disease. One only has to remember the mountains of trash upon which the children played in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, to feel that scavenging as a way of life is not the most desirable.

Environmentally friendly act? Necessity for many who are hungry? Usable goods for practically nothing? Dumpster diving is many things, but not easily dismissed.

## Camp Take Notice given notice



by Carlyn Lusch

The weeks leading up to June 22 were a busy time for the residents of Camp Take Notice and for the members of MISSION, the nonprofit organization that supports CTN. Having learned on May 29 that CTN residents would be evicted from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) land on which the camp had existed for two years, both campers and organizers began preparing for their response and their individual futures.

One of the camp's founders, Caleb Poirer, compared their situation to a bus going up a hill that had run out of gas. "We can effect a change if we're in pushing mode," he said. He was one of many to encourage the group at the all-camp meeting on Sunday, June 17. Although the campers met every week to discuss and vote on camp matters, this last meeting before eviction day was especially tense. It was also unusually well-attended, with not only campers but also members of the media and representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) looking on.

### Where to go

Some campers, like Jackie, who has lived in CTN for a year, were prepared for acts of civil disobedience. "Lock me up, take me away," she declared when asked about her plans for Friday.

Most of the campers, however, were preoccupied with the search for housing or new camping sites. On May 29, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) and Michigan Campaign To End Homelessness announced that they would work in partnership with state and local authorities to provide housing to the residents of Camp Take Notice. Funds were made available for 40 year-long housing subsidies, a figure based on the number of campers staying at CTN when the eviction notice was issued. However, the previous week boasted a CTN population of 68, and as of this story's publication only 33 campers have been offered a housing subsidy – with others having been denied subsidies based on reasons such as veteran status, income, and immigrant status. Those individuals offered subsidies would have a temporary place to stay at the Delonis Center beginning June 21, until they found housing with the help of case workers.



**Caleb Poirer, CTN founder and homelessness activist, briefs community members on MDOT's plan to evict campers. Large numbers of the area faith-community came out strongly in support of the camp.**

For campers without subsidies, the immediate future is uncertain. Some, like Sharon Bridgewater, plan on staying with family members. Others don't have that option. "I really don't know," responded camper Herberto when questioned about his plans. "I don't have any family in this country." Herberto, a U.S. citizen and native of Puerto Rico, said that he was denied a housing subsidy because he found a part-time job three weeks before. "I still think it's not fair. I'm willing to pay a percentage."

Some campers have begun searching for new sites to set up camp. A member of Webster United Church of Christ in Dexter volunteered to arrange rides for the relocating campers, some to clandestine locations. Campers traded leads and advice, weighing the risks of being found on private property by the police. One exclaimed, "If we get arrested, what do we do?"

### Why CTN?

The uniqueness of the MDOT property that CTN has called its home since May 2010 is a large part of why CTN residents want to stay, according to Poirer. It is also close to a bus stop, which is critical for allowing campers to access resources and search for jobs, and is not directly adjacent to a residential neighborhood or a business district. The camp has been located at five other sites around the Ann Arbor area, but has always been evicted within a year or two. Because the current land is owned by MDOT, the Ann Arbor Police do not have authority; instead, the camp has been in dialogue with MDOT officials and the Michigan State Police.

Those entering the camp step over a guardrail, walk down a mulched path

into a wooded area, and after a short distance begin to see clusters of tents among the pine trees. The rumblings of the freeway recede, replaced by muted conversations and bird songs. David, one of the campers, said that he appreciated how beautiful and removed the spot was, and would sometimes sit and meditate. Many of the other campers expressed attachment to the current campsite. "I would rather stay here than get housing," stated one camper.

Another camper, Dule, agreed. "I wish they wouldn't close this place," he said, looking around the camp while giving a tour to visitors. "Isn't it nice out here?"

For many, community support was a fundamental element of Camp Take Notice that would not be easily recreated elsewhere. David described CTN as a place where people "can come and feel safe, get their life back together." Sharon expressed similar feelings. "I feel really safe down here," she said. The governing structure of the camp was cited by the Rev. Curt DeMars-Johnson of Webster United Church of Christ as a reason he became involved. He saw the camp's weekly meetings, in which campers make decisions through a one-person, one-vote system, as "manifesting the best practice of democracy."

### Being noticed

Camp Take Notice started living up to its name in October of 2011, when filmmaker Tavis Smiley and Princeton professor Cornel West filmed footage of Camp Take Notice as part of their five-part PBS special, "The Poverty Tour: A Call to Conscience." Members of MISSION and other camp supporters believe that this publicity may be why MDOT, which until then had been tolerant of the camp's presence so long

as they were actively seeking other locations, began making inquiries into the growing size of the camp. In response to one of these inquiries, MISSION's board, with camper input, wrote a letter stating the camp's intent to remain at that site permanently. Some MISSION members believe that it was this letter that prompted MDOT officials to begin making plans to evict the camp. A formal eviction notice was served on May 29, stating that it would be illegal to be on the property after 12 a.m. on Friday, June 22.

A representative of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), which responded to inquiries made to the MDOT office, said that "safety issues" and concerns of "surrounding neighbors" played a part in the eviction decision. A press release by MSHDA also cited public safety and health concerns as reasons for the eviction.

Representatives of the ACLU declined to comment at the all-camp meeting, saying that they were still discussing options. However, during the meeting one representative explained that their case for reversing the eviction decision, if a case were to be made, would rest on those people who were involuntarily homeless and did not have a place to go after the eviction – thus making potential arrests tantamount to criminalization of status. However, the ACLU was struggling to find suitable candidates for plaintiffs.

### Community responses

In the last few weeks before the eviction, sections of the community came out in force to express their support for CTN and the campers, and to demand that attention be paid to the issue of homelessness. On June 14, members of at least 30 faith-based organizations came together at St. Mary's Student Parish in downtown Ann Arbor for an interfaith prayer vigil. One of those presiding was Rev. Ian Cross of Holy Faith Church in Saline, who later declared his intention to be arrested on the eviction day, "because I think that homelessness is being criminalized and swept under the rug. It needs to be visible, seen, dealt with."

Other community members at the event expressed support for CTN's presence. "We would all want this camp to be closed – the right way," said Daniel Fernandes, an employee at GM and part-time student at UM. He had joined other attendees of the prayer vigil in procession from the church to Liberty Plaza. Looking around at the

see CAMP, page 11

## By the Pound

continued from page 7

park ranger, incensed that they were camping on the head ranger's lawn. He threw their things in his truck and relocated them to the gravel parking lot that passed for a campground in that area. Once he left, the Glens burst out laughing, thinking, "What would he have done if he had seen them a few hours earlier?!"

Later in the trip, a violent lightning storm engulfed them while they tried to reach a small New Mexico mesa town. Riding feverishly against the driving rain, the Glens watched a cactus explode from a lightning hit a mere 100 yards away. After ten minutes of hell, they rode into an old abandoned mining town. There was only one public space and that was a tough-looking cowboy bar. In they sauntered, clad in wet, form-fitting biker shorts. With all eyes upon on them, they retreated to the men's room to dry off and change into dry clothes and were soon barked at: "Hey, cut it short in there!"

After quietly finding a few places at the end of the bar, the other Glen went to call his San Francisco girlfriend, on the pay phone. Slowly the conversation in the bar died and everyone could hear Glen moaning, "Oh Rosie, I love you, Rosie. You know I miss you Rosie," and so on. When Glen hung up, the room went completely silent. Then the bar filled with a cacophony of "Oh Rosie, I love you, Rosie. I miss you, Rosie!" The Glens hustled out and found an



Owner Glenn Bourland's travels took him to many of the places of origin of By the Pound's nearly 200 spices.

abandoned house with broken window glass on the floor that proved a more comfortable place for them to crash and wait out the storm.

By the time they reached the East Coast, Glen missed Rosie too much to continue. Glenn biked solo along the east coast but found that, although he loved seeing the country by bicycle and talking with people along the way, it lost its luster without a companion with whom to share such observations. He shipped his bike home and took off backpacking through Europe and Asia.

In Europe, Glenn visited Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Holland,

England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, meeting and traveling with people from numerous nations. His fondest memories are the times he spent with the Australians and New Zealanders at the Octoberfest in Germany. "Those guys and girls really knew how to have fun."

A tall, pale man, Glenn really stood out in China, especially while he was accompanied by a former girlfriend, a 5'10" Junior Olympic swimmer and swimsuit model. This was 1985, and China had only been open to tourists for a few years. They were okay as long as they didn't stop. Once, Glenn paused to watch a street musician playing and within a minute there were 50 to 100 people watching Glenn watch the flute player.

Chinese customer service was eye-opening. The counters were four deep with people waiting to be served and if you didn't push forward, you never got a turn. He went once to a 15-story hotel, with 30 rooms to a floor, and asked for a room. The clerk told him it was full. As he headed out through the lobby, an Aussie called to him, "You just have to wait him out. This place is nearly empty. I'm the only one on my floor." Glenn returned to the desk every 15 minutes and was told, "All full," until an hour and a half later when the clerk remarked, "A room opened up." Glenn was the only occupant on that floor.

He reflected that at that time, all Chinese teens took a test at age 17 that determined their futures. They were told what job they would have for life based on those test results. Some women were assigned the job of sweeping the freeways, a terrifying prospect in a city like Beijing where there were 30,000 car accidents each year. Glenn surmised that the clerk who had given him the runaround had not wanted the job he was assigned and was desperate to assert his personal power.

Similarly, on a bus trip to the Great Wall, Glenn disembarked with the other passengers when ordered to do so by the driver. When he returned, all the other passengers were already seated and ready to go. As he reached for the door to ascend the steps, the bus drivers shouted at him and raced forward 50 feet. He walked to the bus and the scenario was repeated several times before the driver allowed him back on the bus.

Finally, his brother flew to New Zealand with both their bikes and he finished his journey back in the saddle, riding the entire island north to south.

Upon returning to California, he developed golf and calendar products for a while. Then he set his sights on the health field, specifically homeopathy,

but needed a base training like chiropractic. He opted to train at the Five Branches Institute and graduated with a degree in Acupuncture. During that time he also met and married his wife who hailed from Michigan.

He practiced acupuncture for three years in California in the early 90s. Some of his patients were dying of AIDS. "It is hard mentally working with sick people, especially in alternative medicine with people who have exhausted all other possibilities and are terribly sick," Glenn remarked.

His wife was visiting family in Ann Arbor with their young son and a job opportunity presented itself for her here. They relocated and Glenn considered practicing acupuncture here. He was dissuaded from doing so by another acupuncturist who had recently been prosecuted for practicing in Michigan where it was illegal for anyone but MDs to practice acupuncture. (The practitioner escaped conviction by claiming that acupuncture did nothing, so he was not actually practicing medicine!)

Glenn did some construction work then commuted to Chicago four days a week to work as a trader on the options floor of the Chicago Board of Exchange. The grueling commute and absence from his growing family did not suit him. His wife spotted an ad in the newspaper that By The Pound was for sale and, despite a total lack of experience in retail, they bought it July 1, 1995.

Glenn found running a store to be hard work, especially at first. Luckily, he found Michael, a likeable British tea enthusiast and talented amateur cook with a great memory. He has been a very valuable and trusted employee for many years. A couple of friendly, dependable part-time employees also help at the store, and between the four of them they're able to staff the extensive hours of Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

"I enjoy talking with my customers. They're really interesting, and I think they like the fact that the owner of the store is thy guy behind the counter. They also like buying local, staying green, and saving on packaging," Glenn mused. What he's doing must work, since each of his 16 years has been better than the previous one. He's been approached about expanding and opening stores in other locations but after all his peregrinations, Glenn is satisfied exactly how things are. How green is that, recognizing and choosing sufficiency!

## Groundcover Vendor Code

While Groundcover News is a nonprofit organization and newspaper vendors are considered contracted self-employers, we still have expectations of how vendors should conduct themselves while selling and representing the paper.

The following list is our Vendor Code of Conduct, which every vendor reads and signs before receiving a badge and papers. We request that if you discover a vendor violating any tenets of the Code, please contact us and provide as many details as possible. Our paper and our vendors should be positively impacting our County.

**All vendors must agree to the following code of conduct:**

- Groundcover News will be distributed for a voluntary donation of \$1. I agree not to ask for more than a dollar or solicit donations by any other means.
- I will only sell current issues of Groundcover News.
- I agree not to sell additional goods or products when selling the paper or to panhandle, including panhandling with only one paper.
- I will wear and display my badge when selling papers.
- I will only purchase the paper from Groundcover News Staff and will not sell to or buy papers from other Groundcov-

er News vendors, especially vendors who have been suspended or terminated.

- I agree to treat all customers, staff and other vendors respectfully. I will not "hard sell," threaten, harass or pressure customers, staff, or other vendors verbally or physically.
- I will not sell Groundcover News under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- I understand that I am not a legal employee of Groundcover News but a contracted worker responsible for my own well-being and income.
- I understand that my badge is property of Groundcover News and will not deface it. I will present my badge when purchasing the papers.
- I agree to stay off private property when selling Groundcover News.
- I understand to refrain from selling on public buses, federal property or stores unless there is permission from the owner.
- I agree to stay at least one block away from another vendor. I will also abide by the Vendor corner policy.

**If you see any Groundcover News vendors not abiding by the code of conduct, please report the activity to:**  
**contact@groundcovernews.com**  
**734-972-0926**

## Camp Take Notice eviction

continued from page 4

assembly, he observed that community support had grown considerably over the past year.

Some individuals and organizations see this as an opportunity to find better long-term solutions to homelessness in Washtenaw County. Chuck Warpehoski, director of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice and 2012 Ann Arbor City Council hopeful (now elect), would like the attention focused on CTN to be shifted to “the deeper problem of the lack of adequate, affordable, and supportive housing.”

The Washtenaw Housing Alliance (WHA), made up of several organizations in the county who share the goal of ending homelessness in the region, has been working with MSHDA and state agencies to provide housing to the evicted campers. In a statement made in response to the CTN situation, WHA executive director Julie Steiner said, “We work together to ensure that residents at CTN have access to physical and mental health services, substance abuse treatment, employment support, shelter and, ultimately, housing.”

### Beyond eviction day

Demonstrations in support of CTN’s plight continued in the camp’s final days, with significant attendance and media coverage. Though the eviction was scheduled for June 22, the date was extended thanks to conversations between MISSION and Mark Sweeney, regional manager for MDOT. The camp was given the weekend to finish moving campers to new sites and to hold a community cleanup effort, which



Residents and supporters of Camp Take Notice meet to discuss a possible response to their impending eviction by Michigan Department of Transportation.

would include volunteers from church organizations.

Brian Durrance of MISSION expressed gratitude to Sweeney and MDOT for this extension and for allowing them to stay on the land for two years. He also spoke of the way in which CTN had educated people on the depth of the problem of homelessness in the area. “Lawmakers were unaware that there was such a need,” said Durrance.

Moving forward, MISSION members

still have been hoping to influence Governor Rick Snyder, the only elected official with the power to reverse MDOT’s decision, and are continuing discussions with all levels of government. Also, according to Durrance, MISSION has been in contact with local churches and lawyers, looking at the possibility of improving the current site or purchasing new land for a permanent Camp Take Notice.

Perhaps most significantly, supporters

of CTN saw the public outpouring of support and the willingness of decision makers to discuss options as a victory for the plight of the homeless. As Peggy Lynch, a MISSION member and CTN camper who walked into the prayer vigil event and saw the large crowd gathered, declared: “We have already won.” No matter what ultimately becomes of the site and MISSION’s vision, one thing is sure: this camp was noticed.

## Haiti trip

continued from page 6

Marge VanMeter, retired public health nurse, played integral roles in founding the Faculté des Sciences Infirmières de l’Université Episcopale d’Haïti in Léogâne (FSIL) Faculty of Nursing Science of the Episcopal University of Haiti. After the school was built, they went on to create the Haiti Nursing Foundation with other supporters to fund the improvement of nursing education in Haiti.

We traveled first to Les Cayes, on the southwest shore of Haiti’s peninsula, where commencement ceremonies for the third graduation class of the FSIL nursing school were held. In spite of terrible losses from the 2010 earthquake, the students persevered and earned their Bachelor of Nursing degrees. The students looked

impeccable in their all-white outfits and nursing caps. That evening, we attended the commencement ceremony where the students were decked out in caps and gowns. In spite of the sweltering heat, the ceremony was beautiful. Speeches by the valedictorian and salutatorian resonated with the students’ desires to improve health care in their native country. “Nous sommes la différence,” they said, which means, “We are the difference.”

And they are the difference. With BSN degrees from the only four-year nursing school in Haiti, the graduates immediately started making a difference in health care for Haitians. One new graduate, Dana St. Fleur, had already gotten a job at Johanniter International Clinic, where she was

working primarily with earthquake victims in need of physical therapy.

“Before I graduated, I knew I wanted to help people and be a nurse, but I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do,” Dana said. “Then I came here and can help the people who lost arms, legs in the earthquake. I love what I’m doing.” Dana is not alone. All 50 graduates of FSIL nursing school are working in Haiti, making a difference that grows exponentially. They are well-educated and providing excellent health care... they earn money to support themselves and their families... they buy goods and pay for services which stimulate the Haitian economy... and they inspire others to do the same.

The Haiti Nursing Foundation isn’t

resting on its laurels after helping establish the four-year nursing school. The group is now working with Rutgers University in New Jersey to establish an online master’s program for promising graduates who want to further their education. That training will enable students to become leaders and educators in the future. It is, indeed, the wonderful butterfly effect of a small group of people in Ann Arbor today having a profound effect on the lives of thousands of Haitians today and tomorrow.

For more information about the Haiti Nursing Foundation, visit: [www.haitinursing.org](http://www.haitinursing.org), or email: [info@haitinursing.org](mailto:info@haitinursing.org).

## Putting words on the fences: an interview with Lambchop, fence artist

by Carolyn Lusch

If you've walked, biked, or driven through Ann Arbor recently, you may have noticed certain things popping up on the fences. It may be a construction site, an abandoned lot, or a railroad barrier, and suddenly it has something to say. "Look around," "remember this," "play regardless," "proceed" – these are only some of the words that an artist, known on the streets as Lambchop, has painstakingly woven into the fence links.

I was fortunate enough to have an interview with Lambchop, whom I encountered putting up some art. I was curious to discover what exactly is behind this outbreak of words, and to share it with our Groundcover readers.

**Q: So, tell me about your project and the inspiration for your project.**

A: I'm really interested in what relationships happen between people and graphics and people and objects. I've kind of been working on themes of power, and how objects empower their users.

I was thinking about typography and thinking about pixels and non-spaces, because fences create spaces but they aren't really spaces in and of themselves, and so I was thinking about how do you change that, and what kinds of repercussions does that have, or what questions do people ask.

**Q: And then, what happened? What sorts of questions did people ask, or what happened when people interacted with it?**

A: You know, actually, it kind of took off in a direction I wasn't really expecting. Because at first I thought it was going to be these really lovely kind of phrases. And then I started doing kind of ambiguous phrases, and I started with "play regardless," and people would stop me and ask, play regardless of what? And so I became more interested in the questions that people were left with, you know, in



"get there" is at Hoover Ave., between Division St. & Greene St., next to the train tracks. "remember this" spent its short life at the corner of Maiden Lane and Plymouth Rd. Photos by Lambchop.

response to these kinds of words.

**Q: Land in cities is a huge issue of power, and these are abandoned lots that are probably owned by someone, but no one really knows who, and they're private. Can you talk a little bit about how you're addressing power?**

A: I mean it wasn't entirely intentional to think about who's owning this land. This kind of falls into the power structure that's evident in graffiti. I mean there are tons of variations on what graffiti is about, what tagging is about: is it hostility at the city that has been hostile to them; what is that power dynamic? And for me it wasn't like, you know, "screw the man." Wheat pasting is cool, and spray paint is cool, and those are all really interesting methods of saying what you need to say in a public place. But I really didn't want to ruin someone else's property. I really wanted it to be present, but not necessarily permanent. I respect that this might be someone else's property, but what of the space, what of this interaction? They don't own that. That interaction belongs to the people who are part of the interaction.

**Q: It's interesting that what makes it non-destructive is that it's not permanent, and we saw that with the one that was taken down very promptly – it's kind of sad, but I guess that's sort of the point – that it's temporary.**

A: Yeah. I kind of like that it has this transient quality to it. There are a few that are up, and have been up, and "remember this" was up and then taken

down about two days after. Which, at first, I was kind of like, oh man, that's a bummer. But then I was like, no, this totally fits. You know, remember this and then it's gone! I thought that was really interesting, too, that someone could take it down, that it was able to be removed. Someone was either upset or bothered, or felt like their space had been invaded, so they took the time to remove it.

**Q: What's the one you put up on Hoover Avenue?**

A: That one says "get there." And it's quite nice because it's on the intersection where the train tracks meet Hoover, so there's this dynamic, because cars have to stop when the train is going. And I thought "get there" was kind of nice because "get there" is both – it's kind of affirmative, and positive, but then, where is someone getting to? Sometimes you ask yourself that, and you decide, I don't have a clue! What am I becoming, where am I going?

And there is something interesting about the fact that it has a front and a back. You can see it from behind, and it's backwards text, which is a little different because you don't normally see backwards text. And I kind of liked it facing inwards, towards the empty lot, almost as a way to say: this is an empty lot, this is a contaminated space – apparently there used to be a gas station there – but okay, so, "play regardless." Is it about, we're going to have fun in this space that isn't supposed to be habitable or fun? So I liked the idea of putting it in there, because it kind of reflected on the space itself.

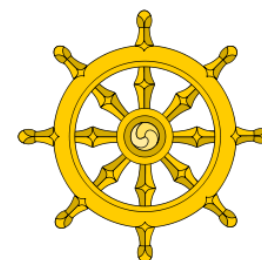
**Q: Are there other things that are going to happen in this project?**

A: Yes, indeed. This is just the beginning, this is something that just kind of happened. It's one of those things that you start doing and then you're like, oh, this is actually kind of cool. And then you keep doing it. So, I'm interested in experimenting with different materials. I actually just bought about a thousand feet of caution tape, which I'm really excited to use, because caution tape has such a strong social affiliation of like, do not go, do not cross, this is dangerous...

So I'm right now not really sure where it's going to go, you know. It's going to go somewhere. And I'm interested in: how does the community react? Could the community be involved? What materials affect the relationship between the people and the fences? So it's really up in the air right now; I'm not really sure, but I'm really excited about it.

**Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say?**

A: I just want to thank people for being curious, and to tell them to look for more. Because it is coming. It's going to happen.



# THE BEST OF GROUND COVER

## NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

### Explaining homelessness to your kids – and yourself

by William Lopez

My two-and-a-half-year-old daughter seems to get smarter by the day. Every morning, she greets me with a smile and about a half-dozen new words of increasing complexity. Perhaps it's because there are so many adults in her life that she is able to hold long conversations about things I once thought far too complicated for a two-year-old. While this new stage is certainly fun, it brings with it its own set of unique challenges.

Whereas the primary challenge with a six-month-old is figuring out if the incessant crying means "I'm hungry," "I'm thirsty," "my diaper's dirty," or all three, the challenge with a toddler is figuring out how to explain the intricate and complex workings of the world both in a manner that she will understand and in a way that does these complex issues justice. This process is also enlightening, however, as creating the "elevator speech" of one's own beliefs can make one reassess those beliefs, their strengths and weaknesses, and what's really at the heart of the issue.

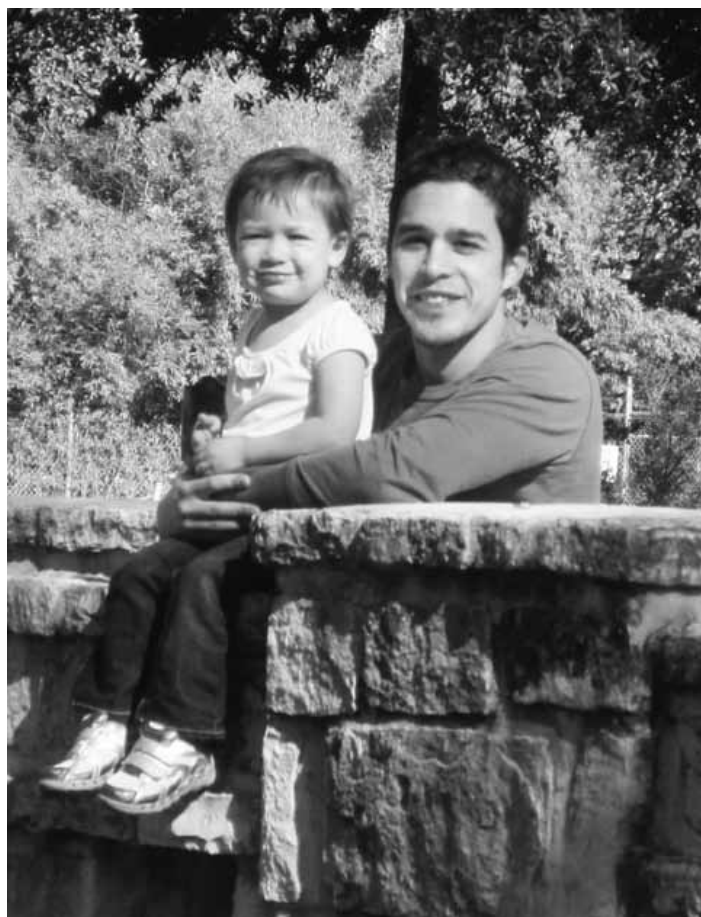
About a month ago, my brother and I went to get some coffee, and I took my daughter with us. On the way home, we ended up at the playground in the very early morning. On the park bench was a man curled up in the fetal position, a bag of cans lying next to him. When she asked me, "Daddy, why is he sleeping there?" I hardly knew where to begin.

In our capitalist, individualistic society, we often frame issues of homelessness, illness, unemployment, use of government assistance, and the like as issues of personal failure that reflect weaknesses in moral character. The "Occupy Wall Street" movement illustrated this mindset brilliantly, with a large group of protesters pushing for a redistribution of wealth, and a competing group arguing that those who work hard will earn wealth for themselves.

Sure, hard work, positive choices, and personal agency can all turn a life around for the better. Rare is the recovered drug addict that does not cite incredible force of will as a driving factor that allows him or her to pursue a better life. But to say that homelessness results solely from choice and moral weakness is to gloss over a simple, fundamental truth: it doesn't. Homelessness is the result of a confluence of social and economic factors, often completely unpredictable and rarely controllable, that can push those with an over-extended social and financial safety net into the abyss.

Safety nets and housing-insecure families in the United States are examined in the National Center on Family Homelessness report, *America's Youngest Outcasts 2010*. It documents the risk factors for homeless children in every state and details the policy and planning activities of the state to address the issue. The study shows a spike in child homelessness following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. It also reports that, between 2007 and 2010, the crash of the stock market and the foreclosure crises resulted in a 38 percent increase in child homelessness. The effects of Katrina and Rita, along with the earthquake in Haiti and tsunami in Japan, illustrate the unpredictability of certain causes of homelessness.

But the financial crisis (along with a deeper look at *who* becomes homeless



William Lopez and his young daughter

following a natural disaster) shows that those who lose their homes are not a random selection of the population. No: it's those whose resources are already stretched thin, those without health insurance, those unable to find employment, who find themselves without a roof over their heads.

As my daughter sat there, waiting for me to answer the loaded question of *why* exactly this man was sleeping outside, I began to think through how the issue needed to be framed, not only when talking to her, but when talking to *anyone*. Because I could not fully relay the complicated and intricate causes of homelessness, I was tempted to reduce it to the individual, and say something like, "Well, he has nowhere else to sleep." While this is true, it is indeed selling the story short. Further, this tendency to reduce social complexity into individual narrative for the sake of simplicity is partially to blame for never thinking beyond the "pick yourself up

by the bootstraps" mentality.

Perhaps we need to think about *homelessness*, not "*the homeless*." This approach zooms the camera out and looks at the *issue*, rather than incorrectly creating this "us versus them" mentality. Additionally, just as we want to avoid ascribing homelessness merely to personal responsibility, addressing homelessness on the individual level can be short-sighted and lack the capacity for long-term change.

While giving food or money to someone that asks and is in need is certainly useful, such small actions do not treat the fundamental issues of poverty that underlie homelessness. Thus, if we want to help "the homeless" – the people – we must address "homelessness" – the issue – with all its underlying causes, through collective activism and social change. We must support programs such as Groundcover News, Alternatives for Girls, and Food Gatherers, that work to address causes of homelessness such as lack of employment opportunities or available health care.

So, as my daughter sat that morning in the park, staring at me, I have to admit: I was flustered. I probably gave her an answer that was too much for her to wrap her little two-and-a-half-year-old head around. After all, the issue of homelessness is often too big for any of us to wrap our heads around. But the fact that the explanation for homelessness is complex does not mean we should over-simplify it. After all, solutions arise from explanation. If homelessness is indeed the fault of those who are homeless, then it is up to them to solve the problem. But if we believe homelessness is a multifaceted, complex social issue, perhaps we will address it in multifaceted, complex, creative, and empowering ways.

How would you explain homelessness to your child? How would you explain it to your friends and family? How do you explain it to yourself?

## Cycling in Ann Arbor

by Rissa Haynes  
Groundcover Vendor

Ann Arbor is an interesting town of intelligence, and full of people with character and unique stories. The Ann Arbor biking community is no exception. As mentioned in the June issue of Groundcover, Ann Arbor residents have many reasons for biking – very good reasons. Among them were health, economics, environmental friendliness and just plain old fun. Also, great accommodations for bikers have made Ann Arbor a favorite place for the biking community. A variety of fascinating stories and services are pedaling around town. Here are only a few...

Arbor Cycle – Ann Arbor's Green Delivery Service. This business specializes in delivering, by bike, up to 70 pounds throughout the Ann Arbor area (downtown and within the city limits of Ann Arbor, but the possibilities are endless). They use one human that is "fueled by Vitamins and water!" and a bike appropriately geared for carrying various loads to and from the downtown area. Their services include courier and package deliveries between businesses as well as groceries

and other household items from local merchants to Ann Arbor residents. More details about Arbor Cycle can be found at their website, [www.arborcycle.com](http://www.arborcycle.com), or by emailing [info@arborcycle.com](mailto:info@arborcycle.com).

Arborcycle is not the first courier service by bike. In 1967, long before email and Skyping, Mr. Gregory Fox used a folding bike to pedal across Michigan delivering telegraphs. Fox joined **Pedal Across Lower Michigan (PALM)**, an organization which has planned six-day bike hikes across Michigan for both families and seasoned riders every year for the past 30 years. Get information about the tours at [palmbiketour@yahoo.com](mailto:palmbiketour@yahoo.com), or call (734) 669-0172.

The **Tree Town Pedicab Company** is Ann Arbor's own bicycle taxi service! They can carry even me and three other people!

Biking involves proper gear, which is



**Bikes of all types can be seen in Ann Arbor. The trike bike, right, is of special interest to author Rissa.**

as fascinating as the services in the area. One biker sports a rear-view mirror attached to his helmet at eye level, giving him greater visuals of traffic behind him.

Steve and Heather make sure that they are seen by the traffic by wearing stylish reflective biking gear. Their original purpose for biking was just a healthy hobby. Biking now is their healthy habit.

Finally, the biker that motivates me to make biking a part of my health habit is



the bike "triker."

This biker says balance is still required. The three-wheeler does facilitate having a "trunk" attached, while the bicycle requires great balance to carry a trunk-load of gear.

Indeed, Ann Arbor's biking community is complete with many fascinating and interesting bikers. It's no wonder the city is considered one of the best bike-friendly communities in the country.

## Building community with art – professor Nick Tobier

by Susan Beckett

Whether you know him as the man behind the Festifool puppets, a professor at the U-M School of Art and Design, or the recipient one of the first Kiva Detroit loans, there is no doubt that Nick Tobier is a man with fresh perspectives. His hungers for color and meaningful social interaction have informed his art to the point that it guides even the production process. He is drawn to public projects based in experience, not possession, and strives to solve social problems in the process.

The world of museum exhibitions and gallery shows proved too lonely to sustain Tobier. The ephemeral thrill of seeing his work admired and purchased was less rewarding than the deep connections he forms with the current recipients of his work. "In my life as an artist, I felt like a chess player and my only contact was with the person on the other side of the board. It was lonely," Tobier recalled.

According to Tobier, designers are trained to produce luxury goods destined for museums or possession by celebrities and business moguls. He now creates for the poorest 90 percent of the world. "It is so much more interesting to deal with complexity and people with a different world view," he

explained. He also values the social life of his work and asks himself, "What am I adding to the world besides more landfill?"

He had an epiphany while taking a break from his life as a traditional artist. He returned to his landscape architecture roots and took a one-year position with the City of New York to refurbish an old park. As he sat with his CAD (computer automated design) program evaluating the park, another employee approached him with the challenge to find something useful for 35 volunteers, all 12-year-olds, to contribute to the restoration that summer. Trading in his computer for shovels, he and the kids built trails, restored an old cemetery and uncovered an old marble test plot that seemed like an homage to Stonehenge. In fact, its marble columns had been set 100 years earlier at the



**Tobier specializes in designing items that attract people and are portable, like this ice cream cart.**

incorporate people into his process. He now strives for collaboration as early in the process as possible. He finds that the sooner he involves those who will interact with the finished creations, the greater the transformations that take place. That leads him to create for those who are in his immediate environment.

While living in western New York state and teaching at Alfred University, he was overcome with the bleakness and monochromality of the late fall and winter landscapes. Craving warmth and comfort, he constructed a colorful, portable "hot chocolate" tent. He'd

direction of Andrew Carnegie who was evaluating marbles for use in the construction of Grand Central Station.

Working in the moment, and the deep connections he made with the kids, impelled Tobier to

set up the tent downtown and invite passersby to come in for a cup of hot chocolate and conversation. Once the thermos was empty or the chocolate cool, he'd pack up his tent and go home until the next time he felt the urge to bring it to life.

When colleague Mark Tucker introduced Festifools, a parade of oversized puppets to welcome spring in Ann Arbor, Tobier jumped right in to help out and share the opportunity with his students. Festifools' mission to bring students and community volunteers together to create unique public art that is free and accessible to everyone aligned perfectly with Tobier's personal stance.

Detroit has been the recipient of much of Tobier's creative output in recent years as he and his students seek to use art to break through some of society's thorniest problems. He challenges himself and them with the question, "What are you introducing that is changing the dialogue of the world?"

Tobier spent time in Detroit, observing and absorbing life there. He noticed people dully standing at the empty corners and waiting for the bus. Back in his studio, he built a padded bench

see ART, page 11

## Bills that bind – the criminalization of poverty

by Susan Beckett

Many of those who settled our country were escaping debtors' prisons in England and an intentional decision to avoid such an institution was made when our nation was established. Yet, we are again imprisoning people for the crime of indebtedness.

Being poor is actually very expensive. Many homeless people have the same bills as housed people; they just are no longer receiving the use of those assets and services while they pay for them. What are common expenses of being unhoused? Storage units, cell phones, child support, unpaid traffic or parking tickets, driver responsibility fees, unpaid utility and credit card bills, alimony, court costs, victim restitution, student loans, life insurance, bank fees (check cashing, money orders, account fees, payday loans and interest), batteries for flashlights or heaters, propane, bottled water, clothes, food, and hotels for the bitterest nights.

For a deeper understanding of the underlying issue, real life examples from people living in Washtenaw County are presented below, though the names have been changed to protect their privacy. These people relocated or returned to this area with their indebtedness in tow. The Washtenaw County court system is quite enlightened with regard to defendant's ability to pay but they are powerless to intervene on judgments from other court systems. If other jurisdictions displayed the same compassion and wisdom as our courts, these people could get on with the daunting but possible task of rebuilding their lives.

David's life took a dramatic turn for the worse when he and his wife separated. Devastated, he walked away with nothing. Depression took hold and he soon lost his job, yet he was still responsible for their home and utility payments. When he tried to file for benefits like food stamps and assistance, he learned his wife already had and since their divorce was not final, he was ineligible to file separately. He is living in a tent and trying to find steady work again but is already amassing utility late fees.

Daniel has been jailed for 16 out of the last 24 months despite committing no crimes. He had numerous problems with the law as a teen and was convicted of a couple of misdemeanors, driving with a suspended license and aggravated assault. Each court appearance resulted in fines, court costs

and sometimes restitution in addition to jail time, leaving him owing \$5,900 to the court. He is in his early 20's and has no family to help him.

Failure to pay court costs is a criminal offense, so he is repeatedly jailed for failure to pay. Every day served in jail in Oakland County counts toward \$10 of payment. He is jailed for 30 to 90 days, released, and then picked up again in a month or two for failure to pay. It is very difficult to get a job with his background. Of course, each time

payments to stretch her money until the next payment came in. Her condition eventually improved to the point she could drive, but by then her driver's license had expired; she owed money to everyone and had exhausted the resources of her relatives. She was still unable to work though she received long term disability.

Driving to a therapy appointment, she was stopped and charged with driving without a valid license, insurance or registration, some of the bills she

translate into interest rates of several hundred percent. She works hard every day and is still struggling to pay all her fines but hasn't managed to do that, maintain an apartment and save up enough to renew her driver's license and insurance, exposing her to the risk of yet more fines.

Jordan ran a furniture business that had been in the family for more than 100 years. After raising their children, he and his wife divorced amicably and he became serious with another woman. He bought land and began constructing a house for them when the housing bubble was at its peak, using his existing house as collateral. The relationship ended, the housing bubble broke and the recession choked off credit. The business faltered and Jordan opted to just close it up.

He no longer had income to make the house payments and lost both pieces of property. Despite many skills and a storage locker full of woodworking tools, he has not been able to find a regular job and has accepted that no one is looking to hire an aging baby boomer. Personal values stop him from accepting benefits, so he uses his investment earnings to pay for his storage locker and buy health insurance and personal items. Living in a tent with no cooking facilities, though, he does rely on community meals for sustenance. As compensation, he spends a vast amount of time volunteering around the community, which he finds very satisfying.

see POVERTY, page 11

*Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.*

– Frederick Douglass

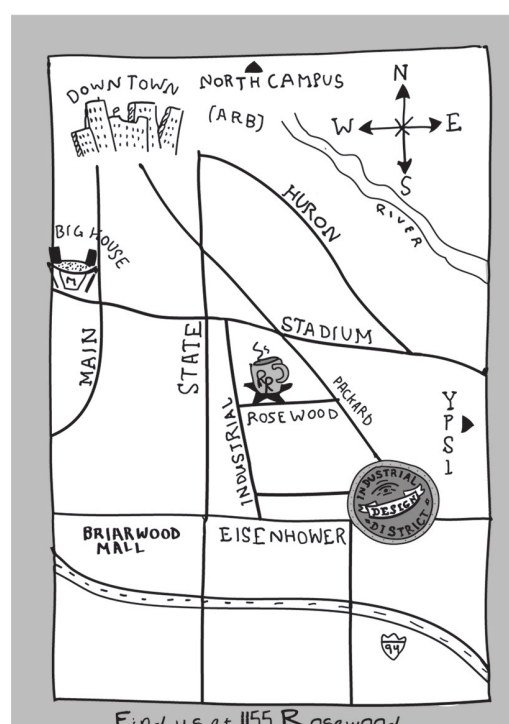
he is picked up for failure to pay, he has a new court appearance and new court costs. The court-appointed public defender fee generally adds \$450 to his bill.

In a late development to this story, David found a sympathetic judge the last time he appeared for failure to pay. Once his story was corroborated, the judge cut his fines in half and changed the failure-to-pay terms from criminal to civil. While his wages can be garnished, he will no longer be imprisoned if he is unable to pay his fines. He now thinks he can start to move forward.

Tracy is an intelligent, educated professional whose circumstances changed dramatically when a disease left her crippled. Determined to regain her mobility and lifestyle, she embarked on an aggressive course of treatments and physical therapy. Once her short-term disability benefits ran out, a downward spiral ensued.

Conventional medicine failed her and the alternatives that were helping were not covered by insurance. Disability payments were insufficient to cover them. Unable to drive or step up onto a bus, she resorted to expensive cab rides. Once her savings were eroded, Tracy juggled her bill

postponed paying in favor of rent, food and utilities. As she couldn't pay her fines, she was put on payment plans of \$10-25 per month. Occasionally, an unexpected expense would arise and she couldn't manage a payment on time. Each late payment was assessed a "driver responsibility fee" and she was put on a payment plan for each of those. Sometimes she takes out payday loans so she can make the payment on time, even though the fees for such loan



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# St. Francis pledges financial support for supportive housing

by James Varani

Member, St. Francis Peace & Justice Committee

What can I, as an individual, do to help homeless people in our area? What can we, as a congregation, do to help end homelessness in the area?

These questions led about 80 people to attend a gathering at St. Francis of Assisi parish in Ann Arbor one evening in April. Speakers represented five organizations: The Delonis Center, Avalon Housing, Camp Take Notice, the VA Homeless Program, and the Washtenaw Housing Alliance. They described their organization's role in the community response to homelessness. Most importantly, the speakers provided information on what volunteers could do to help their organizations. Each of these organizations works with different segments of the homeless population; each has different volunteer needs.

The event was sponsored by the Peace and Justice Committee at St. Francis of Assisi. Many in attendance were from St. Francis parish, but multiple different area congregations were represented, as well as groups such as Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice and the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department. The art work of local artists Susan Clinthorne and Sally Theisen was displayed. The pieces were part of their "Letters Home" exhibit, which is focused on "giving the homeless a voice."

The five speakers provided a framework for the evening's program, but some of the most interesting discussion occurred during the question and answer period that followed. Individuals who live at Camp Take Notice and Avalon Housing commented on how those respective organizations have helped them.

At one point in the discussion, the issue of congregations committing to the support of one or more affordable housing units was raised. Fr. Jim McDougal, pastor of St. Francis parish, who was in the audience, stated that St. Francis would make such a commitment. This brought a round of applause from both the speakers and the audience. It was noted that St. Francis, which already participates in multiple programs to help homeless individuals and other needy community members, is considered to be a model congregation. Catholic Social Teaching is alive at St. Francis.

Those in the audience gained a better appreciation for what some community groups do in the fight against homelessness. Individuals left with handouts detailing specific volunteer opportunities with the represented groups.

Attendees learned about the work of the Delonis Center (named after former St. Francis parishioner, Bob Delonis), a shelter in downtown Ann Arbor. It has multiple programs for single adults without permanent housing. In addition to providing a place to sleep, the Delonis Center provides job counseling and help with substance abuse and medical/mental illness issues. Last year, over 1,000 individuals were helped in both the residential and day programs.

Ellen Schulmeister, Executive Director of the Delonis Center, in her speech told those in attendance that Delonis has a variety of opportunities for volunteers. Regardless of what else a volunteer may do at the Delonis Center, simply being present so that a client has someone to talk to is about the most important thing a volunteer can provide.

Avalon Housing is quite different from the Delonis Center. The non-profit housing corporation owns and manages housing for low-income individuals. Next to the city of Ann Arbor itself, Avalon Housing is the largest provider of low-income housing in the area. Over 200 units scattered throughout the Ann Arbor - Ypsilanti area are managed by Avalon. Like the Delonis Center, Avalon Housing provides support for to its clients.

One of the evening's speakers, Carole McCabe, noted that when an individual



Lotus Yu (above) from Camp Take Notice and Julie Steiner from the Washtenaw Housing Alliance help educate about homelessness.

in Avalon Housing has some sort of difficulty, the goal is to work with that person so that she or he can remain housed – very different from the for-profit realty market. There are numerous volunteer opportunities with Avalon Housing. In addition to office and clerical jobs, volunteers can help with gardening projects, tenant transportation, property maintenance, mentoring and youth summer programs. Individuals with legal and professional skills are also always in need.

Camp Take Notice is a tent camp located just west of Ann Arbor. The camp provides a place

to reside for individuals who might otherwise be "sleeping under a bridge." The camp is run by campers themselves who make and enforce the rules. Community involvement in the camp is headed by a group referred to as MISSION (Michigan Itinerant Shelter System – Interdependent Out of Necessity). The two individuals who spoke on behalf of MISSION and Camp Take Notice indicated that tents, blankets, propane and city bus tokens were always in need. Prepared meals – especially for Sunday evenings – were also welcome. With the truncated Sunday evening bus schedule, it can be hard for people living in Camp Take Notice to stay downtown long enough for dinner.

Advocacy is also important. Legislation at the state level to make homeless gatherings such as Camp Take Notice illegal has been discussed. Camp Take



Notice, which has already moved twice in the past few years, is looking for a stable place. Where campers would go if the camp closed permanently was not addressed at the meeting.

Following this, Shawn Dowling spoke on behalf of the VA Homeless Project. As is clear from the name, this is a Veterans Administration program to help homeless vets. The program tries to reach veterans throughout the entire state and northern Ohio. There are homeless veterans in every county, but in many places, such individuals tend to be "invisible." How does the VA Homeless Project help vets? Shawn looked at the other speakers and said that they worked with all of the organizations already discussed. Additionally, Shawn emphasized how the VA is going to the veterans, thus making itself more available in addressing needs versus the old way of expecting veterans to get to them.

The evening's last formal speaker was Julie Steiner, representing the Washtenaw Housing Alliance. This is an umbrella organization that works to coordinate the efforts of 27 county groups that work to provide housing for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Providing a single telephone number, (734) 961-1999, that can connect at-risk individuals to all of the services provided by the different organizations, and streamlining the grant application process for organizations seeking support for their activities, are two of the ways in which the Washtenaw Housing Alliance works to combat homelessness in the area.

## D's T~Time: they didn't cover this in health class



by Danielle Mack Vendor

You may have noticed some people out there walking around our quaint little town of Ann Arbor that seem more unique than most. I am talking about those people where you think to yourself, "Is that a he or a she?"

These would be people of the Transgendered community. I live in downtown Ann Arbor and I am a Transsexual woman. It is my hope and goal to educate the public about the transgendered community, and maybe even provide some valuable information for those going through similar experiences in their lives.

The state of Michigan is home to three of the United States' top 20 surgeons for Gender Reassignment Surgery. Two of those three top surgeons are here at our beloved University of Michigan. This is just one reason Ann Arbor is bound to see more than its fair share of transsexual individuals. Because Ann Arbor also has a very large gay and lesbian (G, and L respectively) population that is very receptive of the transgendered (T) community, some may come here for a year or two, have the surgery, and just decide to stay.

Please do not get the G and L community mixed up with the T community; there are similarities, but they are very different groups of people. Whatever it is that draws people here, it is important to acknowledge that Ann Arbor is home to this very prominent demographic of individuals who deserve to have their voices heard, understood and respected.

*Please remember that people from this community are people with feelings, hopes and dreams just like anyone else. They can be offended by comments, actions, and words – and quite often are offended by uneducated people asking, saying, or doing something inappropriate towards them. I hope my writing will help you act respectfully toward this community.*

Let's define who is who, what is what, and simple basic courtesies to be observed with each group within this community. The term "transgendered" is used by most people to refer to all gender variant expressions. Transgendered can be used to refer to cross-dressers/tomboys, transvestites, and transsexuals individually or as a group. No matter what group the person comes from, odds are really

good that they just want to blend in and be accepted as the gender in which they present themselves.

Okay. Admit it: you have, in your life, encountered a moment where you questioned someone's gender. Perhaps it was during a stroll down the street where you happened to catch the glimpse of a person's posture out of the corner of your eye and had to do a double-take. Or perhaps you found yourself conversing and gradually beginning to wonder about the person you're talking to.

Curiosity is part of our human nature and, far too often, it can spark some ridiculously insensitive questions. Remember that the person you see or are talking to is exactly the identity they are projecting. You can save yourself a lot of headache, and from hurting feelings, by simply treating the person accordingly, even letting them integrate as much as possible. Treat them and try to think of them as no different than any other guy or girl, based on how they are presenting themselves to you and the rest of the world.

It may be helpful to have a basic outline of how various individuals in the transgender community define themselves. This will help you better understand why some questions you see as normal may be offensive and also give you some answers so that you won't need to ask those embarrassing questions.

"Cross-dresser" typically refers to men who wear women's clothes. This is usually not done on a regular basis. These men are typically happy with their bodies the way they are and have no interest in permanently changing their gender. Cross-dressing is simply a means of self-expression, or an extension of their wardrobe. These men will sometimes even go so far as to give themselves a girl's name while dressed as a woman.

However, most of these guys are heterosexual and some are even happily married. They may even like to go out in public from time to time "dressed" as a woman. Some women find this sort of man more attractive, saying that he is willing to be the man of the house, doing things most men do, but that he shows more of an attraction to some household chores. Wives have told me that their cross-dressing husbands are typically not big-time drinkers, and that they tend to have more in common

with them than with most other men.

Think of this type of man more as a "LARPer" (Live Action Role Player) who prefers to role-play as a woman from time to time. The female persona he is presenting is his character. While a man is "role-playing" his female self, the correct way to address "him" is to get in character with him and, in essence, play along. Refer to him as you would a woman, using female pronouns unless he specifically asks you not to. Just be sure to pay close attention, because there are men out there that just like to wear women's clothing and are not as concerned with presentation. If the person has breasts (fake or not) and some makeup on, then they are probably trying to be true to character, and should be treated as such.

"Tomboys" are a tricky category that will be very hard to pin down. A lot of women just find men's clothes more comfortable, just as some men find women's clothes more comfortable and/or a better fit. Women under this heading can be straight, lesbian

or bisexual. This group really has no hard-and-fast rules that I am aware of. They tend to blend into society much better and are more widely accepted. The simplest rule of thumb for this particular group is that if the woman has gone far enough to bind "her" breasts down to look more like a guy and dons a more masculine hair cut, play it safe and refer to "her" as a guy using male pronouns, unless told otherwise.

Our next stop on the transgender spectrum is the "transvestite." Transvestites can be gay or straight. The most basic definition of a transvestite would be someone who lives part of their day-to-day lives as the opposite gender. These people have absolutely no interest in a complete transition to the opposite gender. They are rather happy with their bodies just the way they are. These people just enjoy having a much more varied wardrobe. One great example of this type of person is a pen pal of mine, Nicci Tristram (stage name). Nicci lives a public life as a female fetish model and female impersonator. In his private life he is a gay male. When traveling the world visiting various shows, doing videos, even online he is referred to as a she. In fact, I have only known Nicci as a she. I have never seen her out of character, so it is difficult for me to even refer to her as a him.

There are female transvestites as well.

I have personally talked to a few, but don't know their lifestyles as well as I know Nicci's. The same rule applies to pronouns in reference to their appearance as the earlier portion of the T spectrum. Refer to them according to how they are presenting at the time. If the person is a guy, and you know them as a guy but they are dressed as a woman, refer to them as "her," or "she." In very rare cases, the person may want you to still refer to them as a guy, but like I said, that is rare. You are much better off for yourself and those around you to refer them as a "she," especially if she presents herself very convincingly as a female.

"Transsexuals" are, by definition, not gay, lesbians, cross dressers/tomboys, or transvestites. We are not men in dresses, or dykes. We are a very unique group of individuals with a very specific birth defect. While still in the womb the sex hormones for the brain and body get a little mixed-up and baby boys are born with the brain of a girl, and baby girls are born with the brain of a boy. As we grow and develop, many of us struggle with difficulty assimilating into society within the physical sex of our birth. Some of us are lucky enough to have a little help on at least attempting to fake our mannerisms to reflect those of our physical birth sex, some are not so lucky. For some, the difficulty with assimilation is just too difficult, and they eventually commit suicide.

All transsexuals would like, at some point, to have a surgery to make their body match the gender of their brain, and correct this birth defect. Unfortunately the Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS – aka, Gender Reassignment Surgery, or GRS) only mimics the appearance of the sexual organ. This is a major shortcoming and, for some transsexuals, a decision-breaker. Some of us want the real thing or nothing; others of us will settle for what is available right now, just so we can move on and more easily assimilate our own bodies into the life roles we know we were meant to fill.

Transsexuals fall into two main categories based on birth sex, each with their own difficulties and hardships: male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM). The sexual orientation of a transsexual is based upon the sex they are becoming, not what they are now. A transsexual woman (MTF) that is attracted to men is straight, not gay. A transsexual man (FTM) that is attracted to women is not a lesbian, he is straight.

*For more on etiquette and details about gender identity, read Danielle's complete articles in the October, November and December 2010 issues of Groundcover.*

## Unhoused past of popular prof

by Susan Beckett

One of the most popular lecturers at the University of Michigan (according to RateMyProfessor.com), Dr. Luis Sfeir-Younis, has boots-on-the-streets experience with some of the subjects he tackles as a sociologist. Having noticed that colleagues, friends and family members tend to disbelieve his story or pretend it never happened, Luis rarely shares about the period in his life when he had no home.

Luis finds that even sociologists are reluctant to delve into questions like, "What is the experience of homelessness?" or "What do people go through, what do they feel, and how does the experience transform them?"

Shame also plays a role in his difficulty talking about it; also the stigma. People might assume it was his fault, that his lifestyle was licentious. He fears his friends and colleagues will henceforth see him only through the filter of "a guy who once was homeless." It could well cost him future promotions. Despite innovating the now-popular dialogue groups while teaching a course on racism and founding the Intergroup Relation Conflict office, he has already been frequently passed over.

He is exposing himself to these risks because he might be in a position to help reduce stigma and challenge common assumptions. Always the teacher, he seizes the opportunity to educate.

Luis' story begins with betrayal. He had pioneered the first LSA course on sexuality, "Love and Intimacy," and it was so popular that as many as 500 students were enrolled at a time. His inclusion of gay rights led to two death threats. He needed escorts around campus and could no longer work late at the library. The Sociology Department chair was unhappy with the course because he claimed it required too much administrative support. It was cut, though Luis received a commendation for his teaching and providing a platform for exploring feminist issues, and had other courses to teach. Ultimately, the death threats and lack of support impelled Luis to leave his job lecturing at U-M in 1990.

His brother urged him to return to South America and join him in developing a lottery for Venezuela. He accepted and helped guide a thriving enterprise that expanded to include providing software, marketing and technical support to 300 weekly television shows. Though he excelled

as an executive, his marriage deteriorated. Luis gave his wife and children both their homes and all their personal assets, assuming the business assets would continue to provide him a high standard of living. "I made in one month then what I make in an entire year now," Luis recalls.

Missing the stimulation of academic life and realizing that teaching was his true vocation, he left business in 2000. Infuriated at Luis' departure, his brother refused to give him any of the business assets or pay him what he was owed. As it was a family enterprise, there were no formal contracts to fall back on – and his brother was the company owner.

Chavez was in power and the business climate in Venezuela was not good. Luis left for Florida, where he had been a frequent guest at Ft. Lauderdale area beach resorts. He settled in Hollywood and used the little money he had to get an apartment and look for a new business opportunity.

Luis managed to stay in his apartment for a while, doing maintenance work for the landlord in exchange for rent, but that left him with no money for food and other essentials and no time to look for work. He received support from a family member for several months. That income ceased when the family member felt the financial pinch and did not see Luis clearly moving toward self-sufficiency.

He slept on the beach for several weeks, using the public showers meant for washing off the salt water after a swim. He learned to shower very early or very late, when the beach patrons were not present with their disapproving looks upon seeing his soap and shampoo. He learned to sleep during the day, impersonating a tourist relaxing on the beach. His personal pain and frustration were powerful, but he did not indulge in drinking or drugs. He did not want to borrow money or



confide in his family or friends. He was sad, depressed, rebellious and negative about society.

Wandering the streets, he came upon a belly dancing studio that was unused early in the day. He inquired about the possibility of teaching a yoga class there in the morning. (As a graduate student in 1973, Luis helped found The Yoga Center of Ann

Arbor.) Intrigued, the owner asked for a number where she could reach him when she was ready to discuss it

further. Upon hearing that he didn't have a phone number but could stop by again in a few days, she quickly figured out his situation and made him an offer. The studio had a bed in the back that he could use when the studio was empty, generally between midnight and five or six in the morning.

Stunned, Luis protested that she knew nothing about him and should not take such a chance. She looked him straight in the eye and said, "I know who you are. In fact, I leave for a three-week belly dancing course in Egypt next month and I will leave you in charge of the studio while I'm gone."

Luis asked if she had done something like this before. She replied, "Yes, one night I saw a woman outside the bus station clutching a briefcase and crying in the rain. I called her over and she explained she had just run away from a man who had lured her and four other women from abroad to marry him. He made them work and kept all their money. She stayed with me and we are still very close."

Luis gratefully accepted her offer. For food, he relied on pizza joints that were

see PROFESSOR, page 8

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## Disaster response man

by Susan Beckett

When I heard of local resident Bob Milstein's frequent Red Cross deployments to disaster areas, I recalled that he once worked for AT&T and had visions of him atop utility poles restoring power. His wife got a good laugh over that. He's been working for years to overcome a fear of heights!

This year, Bob Milstein's routine has been anything but routine. He has regular volunteer days with Food Gatherers and Jewish Family Services, serves on the board of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice, and helps out at a handful of other area agencies and food banks. But his work as a Red Cross Disaster Response volunteer has had him chasing the aftermath of tornadoes and finding replacements personnel for his normal volunteer activities.

In Mississippi he got to do his preferred Red Cross volunteer job: client casework. As a caseworker, he interviews families to determine their needs. He sets them up with the immediate disaster-related services the Red Cross provides and refers them to other agencies as needed. The area he was assigned to in Mississippi was rural, so he traveled to people's residences, most of which had major damage. He educated them about FEMA and helped them request assistance for their home.

He was deployed to Birmingham, Alabama toward the end of the Red Cross disaster relief operation there. Preparing for the next disaster, he cleaned, inventoried and stowed cots,



shelters, and cambros – insulated containers that keep food warm while it's being served from the Red Cross' Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV).

The Minneapolis tornado struck the same day as the tornadoes that hit Joplin, Missouri. Again, Bob was deployed toward the end of the operation, this time to supervise client case workers. The city had red-tagged hundreds of domiciles, indicating they were unsafe to live in and residents had to evacuate. The Red Cross posted flyers and signs in these areas offering assistance and displaying the phone number to call for help. Bob's team staffed the phones and sent out case workers to those calling in.

Dismaying to Bob was that little effort was made to safeguard areas that had been condemned. He recalls one

man who returned from a shelter to gather his things and found that not only had his possessions been taken, but the house had been gutted of its copper plumbing, making it no longer viable for repair. In the face of the Minnesota government shutdown, Bob is concerned about the fate of the displaced people in Minneapolis once the Red Cross has provided all the assistance it can.

So how did an ordinary guy who worked desk jobs all his life become a Disaster Action Team member? It started with Hurricane Katrina. He had

taken an early retirement from AT&T, saw a Red Cross ad for volunteers, and thought, "Why not?"

He and about 200 other local volunteers were trained in a condensed course. He then was deployed to San Antonio, where many of the evacuees from New Orleans were being sheltered. He had been in his hotel for a couple of nights, waiting for an assignment, when there was a knock on his door at 4 a.m. In walked a volunteer manager who had been deployed to Houston and then evacuated to San Antonio when Hurricane Rita was heading that way. He needed a place to sleep and Bob had an extra bed in his room. When he learned that Bob had not yet been put in to action, he said, "Fine. You'll be on my client casework team."

Bob was quickly trained to interview people and set about assisting clients along with other case workers to handle approximately 500 people each day. The Red Cross was sheltering 20,000 people in Kelly Air Force Base and feeding them all three times each day, so they used an expedited interviewing process. A component of the interview process was to verify that those displaced and seeking assistance had not previously received Red Cross aid, ensuring standardized assistance for all affected.

Bob made two trips to the New Orleans

see HURRICANES, page 10

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# FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ANN ARBOR

WHERE TRADITION MEETS PROGRESSIVE INQUIRY AND CREATIVE WORSHIP

## Homeless professor found himself

continued from page 6

closing and willing to give him their leftover pizza, though as a vegetarian he also had to beg for meatless pieces. He knew on which day the local supermarket sold large tubs of cottage cheese for one dollar. He searched the Salvation Army and dumpsters for usable clothing and once pulled out a bicycle that was in terrible shape. A man riding by saw him and asked if he wanted to buy his bike for \$10. Luis gratefully accepted, though that was all the money he had.

He taught yoga wisdom in the morning and found a job as a gas attendant in the evening. In between, he returned to the beach for a shower and nap. One day he awoke on the beach, his eye touching the sand, and realized his eye was an angry, large red ball. After a four-hour wait in the emergency room, the emergency room physician examined him from a distance and proclaimed, "You have an eye infection."

Luis concurred and asked for a prescription, but was told he needed to see an eye doctor – though there wasn't one at the hospital that day. The ER doc referred him to a private eye doctor on the other side of town, but Luis explained he had no way to get there. The doctor paid for his cab ride. Luis was self-conscious in the eye doctor's waiting room and the receptionist regarded him nervously. The doctor saw him and brought him into his office. Luis asked only for a prescription, explaining that he could not pay for an examination. The doctor examined him thoroughly just the same and told Luis, "You will pay me when you can." Luis was profoundly grateful to the doctor, especially for not shying away from touching him.

Exhausted and unable to work during the ensuing days, Luis laid down one evening on a park bench and slept. He awoke to a police car shining its lights in his eyes and an officer ordering him to get up. Confused, Luis asked for an explanation and was kindly informed that it was against the law to lie down and sleep on a public bench. He soon learned to sleep sitting up.

Riding his blue bicycle to the gas station one rainy night, missing his family and the girlfriend still waiting in Venezuela, Luis realized that just another five cents an hour would allow him to start saving for an apartment. Weeping in the rain, lamenting he was 53 years old and his life had come to this, Luis embraced his identity as a homeless person. He accepted the cracks in his skin from a

lack of moisturizer, the lack of luster in his hair from the cheap shampoo, the overlong beard, the wrinkled clothes that he couldn't afford to dry thoroughly, and even the smell. He proclaimed his identity as a homeless person and the pervasive sadness lifted. He was relieved to no longer be constantly on the brink of tears, grateful for peace and acceptance and having sidestepped the depression and substance abuse that so often entrapped people in his condition.

"I had plastic bags with clothes and plastic bags with toiletries and plastic bags with food, all dangling from my bike. I think people feel that when you are homeless you have bad luck with you and it could be contagious, like a cancer. People never want to be close to you, they even cross the street."

Despite her normal distaste for the homeless, the Chilean woman who ran the local laundromat befriended Luis. She introduced him to another customer who worked at Jet Blue Airlines and told him of a janitorial opening there. He got the job, in part by pretending to be an uneducated immigrant. He had already learned that people, even other homeless people, doubted the credulity of his actual story and suspected him of covering up a more nefarious past.

The cleaning job replaced pumping gas but entailed a long bike ride between Hollywood and Ft. Lauderdale, leaving him little time to sleep in the studio bed, but allowing him to start saving. He'd look out at the private jets lining the runways at night and wonder if one of them was his brother's. He recalled how often he had passed through the airport as a businessman, oblivious to those who lived as he now did. "When you are homeless, society looks like condensed selfishness," according to Luis.

He was isolated with no access to technology, spurned by the people in his immediate environment who considered him a pest, and overwhelmed by other homeless people. He found himself walking down the street talking to himself, reconstructing his life story to make sense of his situation, vacillating between his internal identity as the educated son of an ambassador and his external identity as a homeless man. He cherished small acts of kindness.

At a plaza in Hollywood, the unhoused gathered in the early evening. One fastidious man, sporting clothes fashionable decades earlier, always sat alone on a bench and read the paper, never speaking to anyone. When he finished, he'd present the paper to Luis. One day a group of college boys came to the plaza in a van. At first he feared an attack, but he soon looked forward to their visits, replete with sandwiches and beer. A non-drinker, Luis gave his beer to the newspaper-reading man on the bench. The man was profoundly grateful for the contact.

He felt blessed. People began to value his homelessness, regarding him like a Buddhist monk. He was thin and strong from his daily yoga. The shame and sadness departed. "My whole life I had a belly, but then my body felt good and strong. I was okay with what

I was, and life offered me what I needed. It became a life of miracles. One night I really needed toilet paper. I didn't have the money to buy it and I didn't want to just take some from work or a public

bathroom. I was admiring the planes on the runway while working that evening and there, sitting in the middle of the runway, was a roll of toilet paper!"

He wanted to reconnect with his loved ones, but did not want to be part of that cold, selfish world. He realized he would miss the acts of kindness and that maybe people were better-off without so much. "I was more myself then than perhaps any other time in my life," Luis muses. "Homelessness led me to profound reflection on life and self."

His son was in trouble back in Washtenaw County, so Luis scraped together airfare and returned to Ann Arbor. Walking by U-M, he ran into the chair of his old department. The chair greeted him warmly and declared, "I'm so glad you are interested in coming back! Come in September." (This surprised Luis, as no response to his letters of inquiry on the subject had made it back to him.)

Asked for his salary requirements, Luis replied, "Pay me what you think is fair."

An unexpected need for the spring

term moved Luis' starting date to May and, like Dorothy returning to Kansas, his life circumstances once again abruptly underwent a dramatic change. He was able to bring his girlfriend to the states and marry her. People who had rejected him were once again proud of him. It was as if the preceding two years had never happened. Yet he was fundamentally different.

His teaching improved with his greater sensitivity to injustice. Thanks largely to his wife's staunch defense of animal rights, he developed a new focus on animals and society, based on his conviction that animals are sentient beings. He draws parallels between animal cruelty and human oppression, and offers a new perspective for understanding the social concerns of those facing discrimination.

He frets that in Ann Arbor, the homeless are regarded as interesting fixtures outside our circle of concern who merely add to the character of the town. According to Luis, "We have a moral obligation to help the homeless. To be concerned about the homeless is not something nice, a kind of charitable act, but a moral obligation. It may very well be that those who are not homeless may have contributed, in some direct or indirect way, to creating particular social conditions that force a family to homelessness, keep a family homeless, or prevent a family from leaving homelessness. We may have organized our social life in such a way that for some to live comfortably at home it requires others to end up homeless. Not being aware of such a link or denying that it exists does not exempt us from such a moral obligation. Denying responsibility and support to the homeless is cruel, unjust, and unethical."

Luis lives still in fear of a recurrence of abject poverty, especially for the sake of his wife and three-year-old daughter. He finds himself overeating against the possibility of again going hungry, buying more than he needs of a staple that is on sale. No longer is he insulated by the illusion that "It couldn't happen to me!"

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## Rissa's journey

by Susan Beckett

Meet Rissa, whose smiling face and offers of "Get your copy of Groundcover!" often greet people on Fourth Avenue on their way to the Farmer's Market or People's Food Co-op. After her smile and warm dark eyes, people notice her cane, but there is so much more to Rissa than that.

An incurable optimist, she is fighting her way back from a crippling condition brought on by too many hours hunched over a computer. "I go after Moby Dick with my tartar sauce," spouts Rissa, quoting her mentor, motivational speaker Zig Ziglar. "I believe if you tell yourself you can, your brain starts figuring out how to do it, but if you tell yourself you can't, your brain figures out why you can't." Rissa's brain is currently working on establishing her as a corporate trainer or teaching at any level.

Earlier in her life, she graduated from the Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw and headed to MSU where she majored in Economics on the advice of her counselors, and minored in music education, following her passions for teaching and music. An accomplished pianist, she also played saxophone and sang with every choir she could find.

With no real interest in economics, she left MSU prior to graduation. She got her real estate license and financial planning training and worked in those fields for a while she and her family raised her young son. She left for Texas when he was eight and got a job she loved, tutoring at-risk kids. Three of the 4th - 6th graders she tutored ultimately got university scholarships. She then tutored adults in transition from laboring to office jobs and helped them acquire the necessary computer skills. During this time she received her Microsoft Certification.

Good jobs as a Quality Control Analyst for Texas Instruments and Frito Lay followed, along with returning to school to complete her bachelor's degree. After receiving her B.S. in Technical Management from DeVry University in Richardson, Texas, Rissa started their MBA program.

Several times as she was walking, she fell for no apparent reason. Her condition continued to worsen and eventually she was bound to a wheelchair.

Emergency room doctors assured her she was not suffering a stroke, but could not explain why she fell. They had her taking 11 medications but had no diagnosis. One evening on her way to a restaurant for lemon chicken, the only parking spot she could find was in front of an office. Rissa noticed that



Vendor Rissa selling a paper with a smile

along with the letters DDC, indicating a doctor of chiropractic medicine, were other letters she was unfamiliar with. On a sudden impulse she entered the office to find out what kind of doctor this was. Her eyes locked onto the posted doctor's quote, "The physicians of the future will not dispense medicines as much as teach patients to live healthily."

The friendly office staff explained that the doctor was also a nutritionist and neurologist and could help her with her problem and did not mind that she did not have insurance to cover their charges. Their x-rays showed her L4 and L5 vertebrae were crushed, probably because her over-40 body could not handle a string of all-nighters crouched over the computer. Messages from her brain could no longer be smoothly transmitted to her legs.

Halfway through the projected six months of treatment she was feeling much better, though still wheelchair bound. Her mother needed help and Rissa returned to Michigan to take care of her. She arrived at the start of a brutal winter that kept her housebound for three months, during which time atrophy set in and all the gains she made in Texas were lost. She found a similar chiropractor and started over on the treatments.

That spring, she started losing control of her hands and went to the University of Michigan Hospital to see if it was connected to the problems with her legs. They found her blood sugar

and thyroid levels were out of whack but could not come up with a clear diagnosis for the problems with her extremities. They worked on the symptoms and when they wanted to give her medications to avoid the deep vein thrombosis that often results from not walking, Rissa begged them instead to help her walk again. She got excellent physical and occupational therapy that helped her make the transition to a walker.

Upon her release, she had nowhere to go. Her unemployment insurance had run out, her mother and brothers did not know how to cope with her as an invalid and her son was a college student in Texas. Having been a caretaker all her life and never needing government help before, being dependent did not come easily to Rissa.

An excellent U-M social worker helped her apply for assistance and started the process of finding her permanent housing. Meanwhile, she was transferred to the Shelter Association of Washtenaw County facility, the Delonis Center. With no extra staffing to accommodate special needs, Rissa had to adhere to the same rigid schedule as the rest of the residents. Tad and Marianne on the 4th floor helped her as much as they could but it took her nearly three hours just to get out of bed, wash and get dressed. She was written up a couple of times for not leaving the floor on time and it was difficult to get to meals on time, but she credits that push with making her stronger.

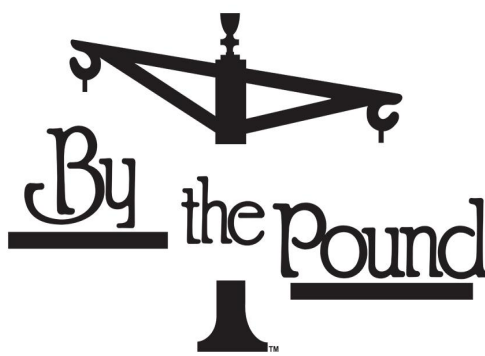
"I never would have chosen this way to go but I am so glad I did, because otherwise I never would have met so many blessed people. I believe you have to bloom where you are planted."

A member of the Delonis staff gave her a keyboard which Rissa uses for finger limbering and making music, though she cannot play like she used to. Through positive thinking, hard work and good chiropractic care, Rissa has left the walker behind and now walks with the aid of a cane and can negotiate stairs slowly. She considers her work selling papers as part of her therapy. It pushes her to move more and gives her a reason to go out, walk and talk with people. When she first started selling, she could not turn quickly enough to catch the attention of passersby. Now she swivels from side to side, easily engaging pedestrians in conversation, and has built a loyal customer base.

She was enchanted with the idea of being a Groundcover vendor from the moment she first heard about it. In high school she dreamed of owning her own business, which she named "People's Enterprise."

"When you're your own boss, there's no floor, but there's also no ceiling," Rissa opines. "That's why I think Groundcover is so neat. There's no ceiling. Another thing I love about this paper is you get to meet so many people!"

Rissa recently counseled another vendor, "Don't spend your energy on stuff you can't do anything about. The past is gone, concentrate on the future!" She walks the walk that goes with the talk.



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*By the Pound, locally owned and in business since 1982, carries more than 170 bulk spices, 80 different teas, and a great selection of coffee, grains, and flour, as well as high-end baking chocolates. Our nuts are freshly roasted from Rocky Peanut of Detroit, and our customers love our wonderful selection of dark chocolate covered nuts and fruit.*

# It's a ball and you bounce it

by Laurie Lounsbury

At this time of year there are quite a few parents who are counting the minutes until their kids are back in school. It's not because they don't love their kids or don't adore having them around – these parents desperately need an afternoon nap.

My mother was one of those parents who couldn't wait to get me in school. She gave birth to me when she was 42, and her hot flashes started about the same time I started bringing pet worms into the house.

I was three years old when I was enrolled in kindergarten, technically too young to be admitted, but my mother begged the school to take me anyway. I was ADD – an unknown condition then – and all my mother knew was that I needed to be anywhere but home with her all day long.

“She's so precocious, she should be in school,” my mother told Miss Kramer, the formidable kindergarten teacher who, from my three-year-old perspective, looked like she was the size of a Kelvinator refrigerator.

“She's very clever, I think she needs the mental stimulation of school,” my mother went on. That was parent code for, “She's driving me crazy and seriously impacting my headaches and mood swings. Speaking of, got any Percocet on you?”

Miss Kramer decided to give me a little aptitude test before admitting me. I wasn't particularly shy, but I found no reason to speak to someone with whom I had nothing in common, so I wasn't about to chat up the old lady. I just stood silently in front of her while my mother extolled my virtues.

“She can write little poems, and she plays very well by herself,” my mother blathered on, nervous beads of perspiration breaking out along her hairline.

Miss Kramer was holding an orange. She had strong, gnarled hands, probably the result of grabbing many, many kindergarteners by the scruff of their necks and hauling them to the time-out chair.

“Do you know what this is, Laurie?” Miss Kramer asked me.

Was she for real? What did I look like, an idiot? I didn't dignify the question with a response. My mother gave me a firm nudge and said, “Answer the teacher, Laurie.” I gave my mother a gimlet-eyed stare and continued to stand silently. If this adult didn't know what she was holding in her hand, I didn't see why it was my responsibility to educate her. She was the teacher, for God's sake! My first impression of public schooling was already taking a turn for the worse.

“Laurie, can't you tell me what this is?” she asked again.

“It's a ball and you bounce it,” I said with disgust, then snatched it from her and tossed it on the floor. To my satisfaction, it actually bounced once before it rolled away under a little desk.

“See how precocious she is?” My mother said, trying to make the best of a bad situation. She had a look of abject fear in her eyes – fear that I would not be accepted and she'd have to put up with me at home, day in and day out, for another year.

“She'll be a challenge, but she seems smart enough, so I'll take her,” Miss Kramer said. Then she laid one of those wide-receiver hands on my shoulder and, with an iron grip, pointed me in the direction of the wayward orange and told me to go fetch it.

I felt my universe shifting at that moment. I took orders from my parents, but not my bossy older sister or big brother. Where did this person fall in the pecking order? Did I have to obey her?

As I contemplated my hierarchical dilemma, Miss Kramer's sausage fingers went from my shoulder to the pressure point on my upper arm, which she squeezed. And then squeezed again, harder. I got it. Telling this woman “You're not the boss of me” was not going to work. I think it's a darn shame that teachers today aren't allowed to use the old, ‘Grab the pressure point’ teaching technique on some students who could particularly benefit from that highly effective motivational tool.

While my mother spent the first week of kindergarten taking blissful, Percocet-laced naps, I was in school, trying to establish myself.

“I'm bigger than you,” one of the boys told me while poking me in the shoulder. “I'm four, and you're only three.” I wanted to tell him, “Your nose is running and mine isn't,” but he had a point. To this day, I can't stand it when someone pokes me in the shoulder to make a point.

When my turn came for Show and Tell, I realized I'd forgotten to bring in something to show. Given my ADD nature, this was not unusual. So I decided to wing it.

“For Show and Tell today I brought... MYSELF! I was born a boneless baby. I have bones now, but I was born completely without them.”

Top that, I thought to myself as I stood

preening in front of the rest of the class.

“Now Laurie, using your imagination is a good thing, but not if you're telling fibs,” Miss Kramer said.

“I am NOT lying! I was a boneless baby! Just ask my mom! She said I was a boneless baby and it came as a big surprise to her.”

At the parent teacher conference, Miss Kramer did ask my mom.

“Laurie has a vivid imagination, but we shouldn't let her get away with making up fibs to get attention,” Miss Kramer said. “She told the class she was a boneless baby. Now, why would she make up a story like that?”

My mom cringed in front of the old spinster teacher.

“Well, ah, what I actually told her was that she was a BONUS baby... she came as a surprise. You see, her father and I had some Jack Rose cocktails one night – ”

“Ah, I get it,” Miss Kramer murmured. “Say no more.”

So if you're one of those parents who has a uniquely challenging child and you can't wait for him or her to get back in school, ah, I get it too, say no more.

And when your child is back in school, I hope you can squeeze in a nice nap.

Next spring Groundcover will host a benefit performance of comedian-philosopher Steve Bhaerman, also known as Swami Beyondananda. Leading up to the performance, we will be sharing some of his funny wisdom with you on a monthly basis. If you want it on a daily basis, visit his website and sign up to get a daily laughsitive: [www.wakeuplaughing.com](http://www.wakeuplaughing.com)

## SWAMI'S DICTIONARY

TRANSCENDENTISTS: THOSE WHO HAVE LEARNED TO USE MENTAL FLOSS TO PREVENT TRUTH DECAY.

TODAY'S LAUGHSITIVE: “DRIVE YOUR KARMA, CURB YOUR DOGMA.”

– SWAMI BEYONDANADA

# Hurricanes keep Milstein hopping

continued from page ??

area during the six months the Red Cross carried out relief operations there and he traveled there in February with the Jewish Federation to supervise a group of rabbinic students for one week. They attempted to repair a fence and cleaned out a temple that had been destroyed. They dug an enormous pit and buried the sacred texts according to Biblical law. The next week, Bob led a group of high school students who gaily smashed rotten drywall and gutted houses. They also duct tape closed abandoned refrigerators and moved

them to the street for pick-up. “The smell stayed in my nostrils for weeks afterward,” Bob recalled.

Returning with the Red Cross in March, he was assigned to feeding duty in the lower Plaquemines Parish. As he drove the ERV through the streets, he was struck by the sight of boats in trees and houses smashed into one another. He delivered most of the meals to a FEMA trailer camp. The nearest grocery store with electricity was 50 miles away.

Living so long without basic services took a large toll on people. Bob noted that among the most-needed volunteers were mental health professionals. As time went on, there were many suicides among evacuees.

Once the Katrina operation concluded, the Red Cross informed Bob that if he wished to continue as a volunteer, he'd have to be active in the local chapter's Emergency Services group. He agreed and now is “on call” for local emergencies one out of every six

weeks, and national disasters if needed. Because he likes to be involved with people, he prefers casework.

He describes himself as an average guy, one of some 250,000 Red Cross volunteers across the country. He notes they are always looking for more volunteers and will teach newcomers what they need to know. All volunteers need is a desire to help.

Contact the Red Cross at [wc-redcross.org](http://wc-redcross.org), or call (734) 971-5300.

## Tobier's art builds community

continued from page 2

on wheels, outfitted with a radio and canopy. He brought it to Detroit, wheeled out his portable bus stop and waited for company. Sometimes only one person would take advantage of this latest gesture of generosity, but sitting and talking with them while they waited was rewarding to Tobier.

He next constructed a newsstand on a trailer that can be pushed by hand or towed by a car. This newsstand both collected and dispersed news. Along with old fashioned, bamboo library newspaper stands made for browsing, it was outfitted with silk screen broadsheet and videotapes so people could record answers to the question, "What is the most important thing people should know about your neighborhood?"

Learning that access to healthy foods was a pervasive problem, Tobier and his students worked for two years on a mobile produce stand that they set up in various Detroit neighborhoods under the watchful eye of three men he met at the Capuchin soup kitchen. (He ate his meals there while he was building an outdoor classroom in that Detroit neighborhood.) The presence of the local men and the whimsy of the stand helped alleviate the suspicions of people who had not yet met Tobier. More than just a stand, the men strove to incorporate civility and inspire socializing while buying vegetables. A testament in part to their success, the urban agriculture movement has since taken hold in numerous Detroit neighborhoods.

Brightmoor Bikes is Tobier's most recent venture. The remote and blighted Brightmoor neighborhood, targeted for annihilation by the Detroit Department of Public Works, was not well served by city buses and received no positive attention from the city. It is populated by elderly residents reluctant to leave their houses and young activists working to save it. Brainstorming with recent high school grads, they embarked on a mission to make the neighborhood self-sustaining and determined that rather than waiting for rescue, "We can start something."

Recognizing that besides walking, biking is the only mode of transportation available to many in the neighborhood, Tobier considered how to expand their utility to meet more of people's needs. He was also struck by the sense of futility he encountered in the teenagers and young adults. He responded with the Brightmoor Youth Employment Project, in partnership with the Brightmoor Detroit Community High School, which provided part-time jobs for recent high school graduates. They built custom bamboo bike trailers, some of which were fashioned to haul gardening tools while another featured a cooler for ice cream. They are developing one for deliveries and another to transport instruments for a rock band. The most common model holds 150 pounds and costs around \$85.

When they received a start-up loan from Kiva Detroit at the start of this summer, they metamorphosed into a business and took the name Brightmoor Bikes. Though each of



the trailers has been handmade to satisfy the needs of a particular customer, off-the-shelf models should become available as solutions to general needs are perfected. About the loan, Tobier noted, "The Kiva loan has been most instrumental in visibility –

from the launch to the publicity. The money doesn't hurt, for sure, but it is all the infrastructure and the network it provides that really helps."

It's hard to know what the future will hold, but Tobier would like to build



Tobier's hot chocolate tent, above, relieved dreary Vermont winters. The hand cart takes little space when standing upright.

a bicycle with a bamboo frame. He favors bamboo since it is renewable, inexpensive, strong and beautiful. When he gets around to it, you can be pretty certain it will be a group project that will benefit an underserved population.

## Criminalization of poverty

continued from page 3

Sara's car broke down when she did not have the means for fix it. As she worked, saving for the repair, the car was ticketed several times. She finally got the starter replaced and moved the vehicle despite her fear that the remaining radiator leak might result in permanent damage to the car. While she scraped together funds to fix the radiator, the car was towed, despite her note explaining the car was not abandoned and leaving it parked in a spot with no posted restrictions. She now has to accumulate towing and storage fees in addition to the cost of replacing the radiator. She already juggles her regular bills for a storage locker, cell phone and car insurance while she struggles to save enough to rent a room, at least for the winter. She tried to open a bank account to protect

her money while she saved but was told the minimum deposit to avoid fees was \$100, more than she could manage.

For Tonya, the real trouble began when she got involved with the courts. A disorderly conduct charge landed her in jail because she could not afford bail. Staying there would cost her custody of her child, her job, and ultimately her apartment. She saw no alternative but to plead guilty and accept the fines, which were structured on a payment plan in accordance with her current income and expenses. She subsequently lost her job and was unable to pay the remaining \$35 in fines. A felony warrant was issued for her arrest for non-payment, a parole violation. She has not been able to get a good job since as she can no longer pass the

background check. She is afraid to return to the area to try to settle the matter, as in her experience, they are likely to throw her in jail and keep her there unless she can pay a large fine, which would again put her child in jeopardy.

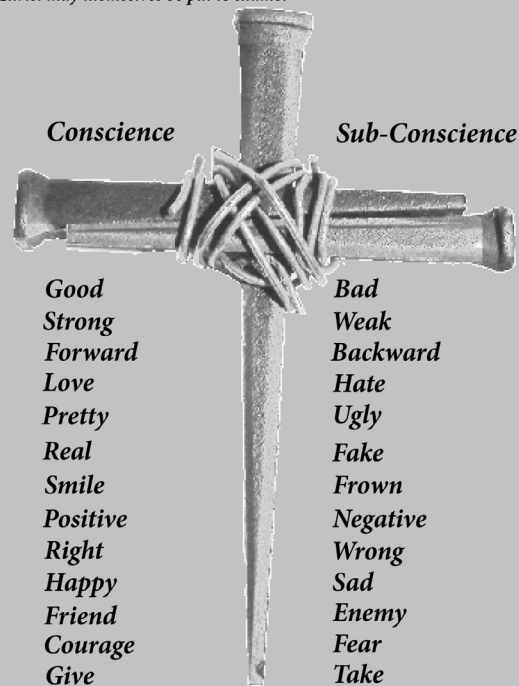
So why do the courts impose impossible conditions on people that predispose them to homelessness and repeated incarcerations? Victims and lawyers have both asserted that some court systems rely on fines to fund judicial budget shortfalls. Often, the threat of jail extorts money from family and friends, or ill-advised payday loans. Jails and prisons are important to the local economies of some communities. These assertions were backed up in a class action court case against the city

of Gulfport, Mississippi in 2005 which challenged the lawfulness of arresting and jailing people for non-payment of fines, regardless of their circumstances or ability to pay. The city had a well-known practice of stopping people in the poorer parts of town for no apparent reason and running their information through the system to see if they had any outstanding warrants against them. If they did, they were jailed unless they or those who cared for them could come up with the money they owed for previous fines and judgments. Many were jailed for months at a time. While they sat in jail, paying off their fine at a rate of \$25 per day served, many lost the meager employment and housing they had managed to secure.

### The Conscious Mind

by Shawn Story

But do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.



### My Brother

by Destiny Brown

Dedicated to: Cornell Brown Jr., my lil' bro

Two months confined  
Thanks all to momma

Poor lil' brother hurt by the drama  
Beaten so much so many times  
That he couldn't live in pain so he ran away

Tried to run and hide from life's demons as much as he could  
But things just don't turn out like they should

He's follow'n after me his big sis  
Things aint look'n good though if they're turn'n out like this

All we ever wanted was to be loved and be treated fair  
have a real mom who was always there  
and wasn't always fake and one who just cared

Is it too much to ask god  
Can momma get what she deserves with a similar rod  
Like one she let her man threaten and beat us with  
Or maybe u could give a slight eye opener to cops what started this

### The Garden of Love

ONE DAY THE CLOUDS MADE A THUNDERING  
SOUND, HE PLANTED THE SEED  
IN HIS PRECIOUS GROUND,  
KINDNESS AND HAPPINESS GREW CLOSE  
TOGETHER, THE GARDEN OF LOVE WILL BE  
HERE FOREVER, THE RAINS FELL FROM UP  
ABOVE AND OUT OF THE GROUND GREW  
THE TREE OF LOVE, GOODNESS WAS THE  
FRUIT THAT MADE LIFE, THE SEED  
OF RIGHTEOUSNESS GREW AND GREW  
LOVE WAS ALL AROUND, BEAUTY ALWAYS  
COULD BE FOUND, THE GARDEN OF LOVE  
IS SO DIVINE IT COULD BE FRUITFUL UNTIL  
THE END OF TIME, HE BLESSED HIS FERTILE  
SOIL HE ENRICHED THE GRASS, WHEN THE  
SEED OF HONESTY WAS PLANTED IT WAS  
INTENDED TO LAST, HATRED WAS EMBEDDED  
DEEP IN THE ROOT, IT WAS FORBIDDEN TO  
BRING FORTH FRUIT, HIS SPIRIT OF GRACE  
GLORIFIED EACH DAY, HE ENLIGHTENED  
THE SHADE OF DARKNESS IN HIS OWN  
MYSTERIOUS WAY, THE SUNLIGHT IS SHINING  
FROM UP ABOVE AND ON THIS EARTH IS THE  
GARDEN OF LOVE.

by Clayton Williams

### m.i.a.

by Karen L. Totten

The bracelet always hung loose around my wrist,  
silver, with a name etched in block letters,  
dangling as I wrote out equations,  
clasp catching on the sleeve of every sweater.  
Missing in action, Michelle said,  
as though he was in mid-sprint  
down the Ho Chi Minh trail,  
then, suddenly, vanished.  
Wear it until he returns, she said.

The war stumbled on.  
Every night body counts on the news.  
Not an unnamed soldier  
though unknown to me - so  
I imagined him a possible family,  
a favorite cake, the way his face looked in moonlight.  
And did he look often at the moon,  
dreaming of home,  
wondering if he'd ever leave the jungle  
and get back to Pittsburgh or Topeka  
or the fragrant hills of Tennessee?

His name never did show up on the rosters.  
I've kept the bracelet in a box.  
Sometimes I pull it out and look at it:  
the metal still gleams though the name has rubbed pale.  
He's with me still -  
a sliver of moonlight tattooed around my wrist.  
I close my eyes. I can smell the sweet grass  
blown by the wind.  
See, he's running full out down the hillside.

### Whose Plea Bargain? No Bargain!

(The following poem is written from personal accounts and shared knowledge. It does not apply to all public defenders. No offense meant; I just want to share my experience. - L.)

by La Shawn Courtwright

It's only a self-sealed fate!  
What choice do you have?  
The what seems for that time, to be the lesser of two evils...  
It's gone come back to haunt you, jus when things begin to look up...  
One more smack in the face!  
Too late to change it now, another so-called conviction got no choice.  
Take a bite from either the one-headed or the two-headed snake.  
Some Public Defenders! Are you kiddin'? A lot of them are fake!  
A two-bit a\*\* Public Defender, before even speaking with you; done already made the deal before you approach the bench.  
They make you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothin but the truth  
..Then you find yo'self coppin' pleas to lies...  
For your freedom, which is on the line!  
They're only creating under the color of the law, a record of forced convictions on you.  
What kind of shi\* is this? It damn sho' aint justice, yo' freedom has now become more of a compromise; under the guise; color of law!  
Don't git me wrong, not all Public Defenders are bad.  
Then again, it may depend on what yo' charge or more likely what charges you face...  
They don't really care about you,  
Specially if their reputation is at stake!  
When you're poor; can't post yo' bail...  
Or hire a paid attorney who may be a lil more willin to fight for you tooth and nail,  
You run the risk of losin everything you own or things you can't replace  
like yo' family pictures; a job; or even yo' mind...  
While you and yo' gifts rot in a jail cell!  
Once again all your dreams; plans; postponed; canceled-out by a so-called justice system that serves "you" only as a pit of snares.  
It's not easy to climb higher when there's something underneath you that they won't let stay in your past,  
Keeps being used, pullin you back down,  
Don't know how long this gone last!  
Thankful that I'm self-employed.  
How many jobs can one person replace?  
Our economy is in a job-market crash!  
They don't really know "me," who I really am!  
"Their" documented reports; trumped-up convictions decharacterize my person...  
It's a bullshi\* legal sham!  
They expect me to be rational, while these are the tactics used to take away everything that I Love...  
My family; new-found career, I feel so misunderstood  
I wish I knew how to tell you how this feels.  
Even so, I still don't think you'd get the real deal!  
I want to EXPLODE, I'm gone BLOW-UP one day!  
It's a silent EXPLOSION, the kind bringin success not DISMAY!  
SEE!  
Just right there, you almost got me wrong again...  
I'm too strong fa' dat, my brain too thick, great thoughts "I think" my friend!  
It's already past the dura and skull which is not big enough for it to fit in...  
How can I contain all this Knowledge within!